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ABSTRACT

In 1993-94, a random sample of 547 individuals authorized to perform marriages in Australia (marriage celebrants) and 560 couples from across Australia who had married in 1993 were surveyed regarding their views of premarriage education (PME) and the factors enhancing/inhibiting participation in PME programs (PMEPs). Of the marriage celebrants, 313 (57%) were religious. The survey established that PME means different things to different people. Religious celebrants were more likely to refer couples to PMEPs than nonreligious celebrants were. Only 14% of religious celebrants (versus 47% of civil marriage celebrants) believed that encouraging participation in PME was outside their role. The following factors were identified as the biggest barriers to participation in PME: lack of interest; time constraints; lack of family encouragement; lack of program relevance; and previous marriage. Nonparticipants had three reservations about current programs: purported religious nature and intrusiveness, confusion over the difference between counseling and education, and their value for divorcees who are remarrying. Dispositional factors (personal beliefs and attitudes about oneself, couplehood, and marriage) were the most significant reasons for nonparticipation. (Appended are the questionnaires, statistics on marriage by state, and statistical summaries of responses. Contains 66 references.) (MN)

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Pathways to Marriage:

Learning for married life in Australia

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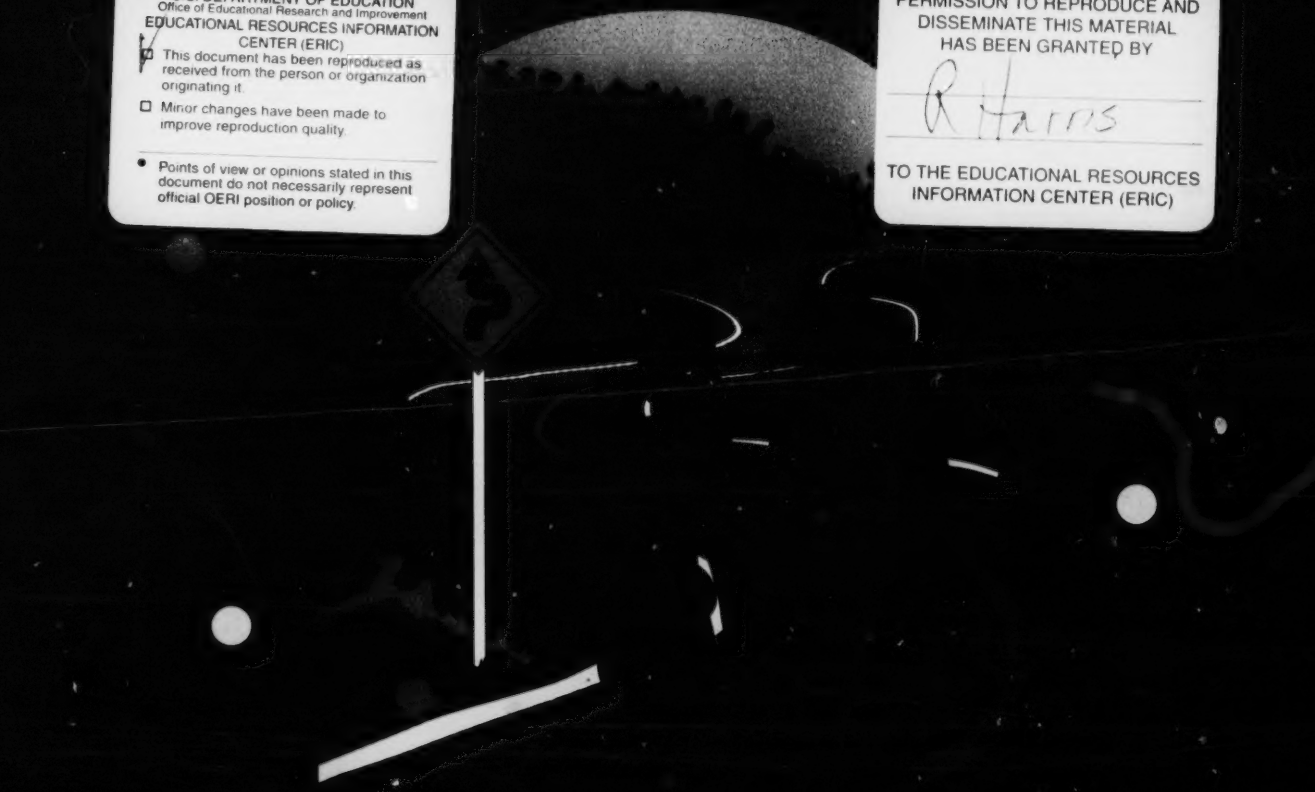

Michele Simons, Roger Harris
and Peter Willis

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Pathways to marriage:

Learning for married life in Australia

Michele Simons, Roger Harris
and Peter Willis

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Pathways to Marriage is the second major piece of research on pre-marriage education to be undertaken by our research team at the Centre for Research in Education and Work within the University of South Australia. It provides further evidence of the growing maturity of marriage education and the tremendous efforts being made by a number of organisations and individuals to better promote and deliver professional services to couples who marry in Australia.

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Michele, Roger and Peter

Part 1

Learning for marriage

Chapter 1

Introduction: Learning for marriage

The journey and the pathways

One of the most common images of marriage is a couple surrounded by friends and well-wishers emerging from a church or state building, being photographed and then ceremonially farewelled as they drive away on the road of their new life together. The wedding at the church or hall begins with a ritual meeting when the bride walks up the aisle and meets her husband-to-be, thus symbolising the coming together of their separate life paths. The ceremony ends with the couple now married departing together on their common pathway down the aisle of the church and from the church to the rest of their lives.

Marriage carries the image of travel. The couples' initial encounters bring paths together and the time together forges a common pathway. This common pathway is constructed by the couple as they move towards and then through marriage, getting to know each other and their opposite families and friends and interpreting and consolidating the experiences and demands of their life together.

All roads to marriage meet a common checkpoint when the couple to be married engage a celebrant to officiate at their wedding. It is the first point in the interface between the couple's private world and the outside world of state and often church as well. When the couple and the celebrant meet, each has expectations and some sense of negotiation to make the encounter work. The couple is at their most suggestible and vulnerable at this point. Most are not familiar with the details of wedding protocol and may be a little nervous. The celebrant tends to be cast in the role of one who knows what is best. The meeting between celebrant and couple is therefore a central moment for the success and pleasantness of the coming wedding. What the celebrant suggests or fails to endorse may be given a heightened importance and his or her advice given careful attention. It is a moment where, to a greater or lesser extent, some shaping of the last part of the pathway to marriage can be negotiated. The couple can suggest modifications to the ceremony and can expect the celebrant to comply where possible. The celebrant can suggest things the couple should do and/or learn in preparation for their wedding (such as participating in some pre-marriage education activity) and expect to be listened to at least to some extent.

Long before the meeting with the intended celebrant, the pathway to marriage has been full of challenges, many of which require further learning. Couples are confronted with 'things they need to know' which they may feel themselves or which may be pointed out by interested people and groups along the way. There is no lack of such interested parties attempting to shape and enrich their pathway to marriage: psychologists on talk-back-radio, medical and welfare professionals, parents and of course churches.

The interaction between such interested parties and the couples can occur through reading and through one-to-one discussion with professionals or with family members and friends. They can also be more formal through participation in structured pre-marriage education. Many churches have established pre-marriage education services ranging from one-to-one counselling to formally structured courses. Couples planning a church marriage have often been recommended, usually by the celebrant they have chosen, to attend some form of pre-marriage education.

The introduction of a pre-marriage education program modifies the pathway to marriage of couples planning a church-based wedding. It mingles the couples' expectations with those of the church and its pastoral care for couples. Indifferent or reluctant couples, concerned that all go well at their wedding, may not wish to resist the recommendation of the celebrant and perhaps risk his or her goodwill. Couples not planning a church wedding on the other hand, may not feel under a similar pressure from the civil celebrant who may see the celebrant's role very differently.

There is considerable anecdotal evidence that couples attending pre-marriage programs whether interested or reluctant, value the experience. This seems to strengthen the idea that some form of pre-marriage education might be good for all Australian couples not just those contemplating marriage in a church celebrated by a religious minister with an interest in pre-marriage education.

Research studies

Two related research studies, of which this is the second, have been undertaken to explore couples' experiences of pre-marriage education programs and whether they should and could be offered more widely to any couples planning to marry.

In 1992, a research study on the experience of pre-marriage education programs was commissioned jointly by the Catholic Society for Marriage Education and the Australian Association for Marriage Education, and funded by a grant from the Federal Attorney-General's Department. The findings were published in 1992 under the catchy title, *Love, sex and waterskiing* (Harris, Simons, Willis and Barrie 1992). A major part of its information was gained from a national survey of almost 900 couples who had actually participated in a pre-marriage education program.

A significant finding was that no matter how reluctant and / or hesitant participants had initially been, an overwhelming majority not only registered strong approval for their experience of the course but indicated that, as a result of their participation, they

were more serious and committed to entering their marriage as a down-to-earth project rather than simply a romantic ideal.

It was this outcome, together with the couples' approval, that encouraged further investigation into whether this valuable experience would be useful for non-church related couples. Would such couples be happy to participate in pre-marriage education? Would celebrants who were not church ministers be happy to refer such couples to programs? *Pathways to marriage*, the current study, set out to explore these questions.

The earlier study had discovered that most couples who participated in a pre-marriage education program had been told about it by the celebrant they had chosen to officiate at their wedding. Such information had been offered with varying degrees of enthusiasm and authority ranging from half hearted information to a virtual command to attend. The celebrants' referrals were named as a major factor in influencing couples to attend, particularly when they were somewhat reluctant or at least had felt no strong desire to participate. It was not clear whether celebrants who are not affiliated with a church, as well as seeing themselves as a witness on behalf of the state, also construe their role in a quasi 'pastoral' or welfare way similar to that of religious celebrants. This seemed to be the first issue to explore.

The second focus of the study concerned the attitudes and ideas of couples throughout Australia towards participating in some form of pre-marriage education, whether an informal series of counselling talks with the celebrant chosen to perform the wedding or a more structured program.

As was pointed out, nearly all the participants in the first study were planning a church sponsored wedding and had some kind of church affiliation. The church was seen to have the authority to require them to attend a pre-marriage education program because of its official pastoral concern. It seemed evident that if a similar reluctance or at least indifference to pre-marriage education programs was present in couples not interested in a church wedding, they might not accept an authoritative referral to a program from a secular celebrant who could not claim a similar foundation for his or her authority. It was therefore important to discover what kind of attitude couples across Australia had towards pre-marriage education programs

These two tasks with their component questions build on four background ideas concerning the nature and sponsorship of pre-marriage education programs. The first concerns two faces or aspects of marriage, each generating learning challenges. The second is the nature of the learning challenges surrounding marriage under the two aspects listed above. The third looks at the nature and many faces of pre-marriage education programs. The fourth explores kinds of participation in pre-marriage education programs: ritual, religious and educational events.

Marriage, learning and education

In the earlier study, it was written that the popular idea of marriage tended to be seen as a

> *'natural' thing to do; something that 'happens' to people rather like 'falling in love'. Many people tend to believe that the challenges of married life will be overcome by the strength of their love. They believe that love will conquer all; that there is no need to approach married life as a vocation requiring skills and knowledge that need to be learnt and re-learnt throughout life.* (Harris *et al* 1992:5).

An alternative view of marriage as a *vocation requiring skills and knowledge* espoused in those lines has a prosaic ring to it. It highlights the functional dimensions of marriage as a contractual relationship requiring for its maintenance good communication and conflict resolution skills which couples can learn. Such sober thoughts on the inadequacy of romantic notions of 'love conquering all' should not be taken as dismissive of the more mystical power and mystery of marriage as a union of souls as well as bodies. One dimension of marriage does not cancel out another and each generates learning challenges.

In terms of the learning challenges it generates, marriage can be looked at in two ways. The first is a very obvious one: it can be understood as a personal historical experience (a personal journey through time) involving two people, their family and friends and eventually the state. It can also be looked at in a second way as a social institution with a number of stakeholders which is variously constructed according to the stakeholders' ideals and interests. It is these various approaches which generate different kinds of learning needs that learners attempt to meet in different ways.

Marriage as a shared journey

When a man and woman become attracted to each other, decide to become a couple and eventually arrange to marry, they are involved in sequences of often unfamiliar experiences which have generated the metaphor of a journey. They travel along a pathway not as yet known which they construct as they go in reaction to and dialogue with the influences they experience.

Their journey begins with the encounters experienced in meetings, conversations, words and actions of attraction and subsequent intimacy. When the encounters lead to them becoming a couple, another series of activities marking their couple status, overlays their ongoing loving one-to-one exchanges. They become regular visitors at both families, attend sporting clubs, church activities and other social gatherings as a couple and begin to plan a shared future. Their choice to marry involves them in meetings with officialdom whether church or state, and the endless things to be done in preparation for their wedding. The signing of the wedding parchment is the first of many occasions where the couple's married status will be acknowledged and provisions of legislation relating to married people invoked. As their life together grows it is built and deepened by their shared personal and historical experiences.

Marriage as a social and cultural construct

As couples find out quickly enough, marriage experienced and named as their personal journey has another whole identity as an institution differently interpreted by different interest groups. The major approaches can be grouped into individualistic views which see marriage as an institution essentially for the enrichment of the couple and more social views which see marriage in terms of its contribution to the fabric of the social systems of church and state.

Individualistic views

Individualistic views of marriage see marriage as an institution to support the couple's desire to achieve love, self fulfilment and mutual support. Marriage enshrines and protects their relationship. This view has a range of variations.

The sentimental or so-called *'romantic'* idea of marriage, beloved of commercial media, portrays marriage as a site of endless mutual love and happiness which enfolds and supports the lovers who enter it. Whereas such a caramelised view of marriage places no demands upon the couple except to relax and enjoy it, there are other significant ways in which individualistic views of marriage have been constructed which generate different expectations and learning challenges.

The *humanistic, developmental* view of marriage sees it as a site of self realisation in which the couple, in their 'unconditional positive regard' made famous by Carl Rogers (1961 & 1969), offers each other opportunities to come to their full potential. Carl Jung (1973) pursuing a similar agenda to that of Rogers, identified a process of imaginative and metaphoric thought used by people searching for meaning and integrity in their lives. This approach to marriage focuses on the images people carry with them which are evoked when they think of marriage and which have great power in generating satisfaction or unhappiness, values and choices. This perspective responds to the mysterious and psycho-dynamic depths characteristic of many loving sexual relationships. As Moore, a contemporary scholar in the Jungian school, writes (1994:46):

> *Marriage has less to do with conscious intention and will than with deeper levels of soul... We approach its soul when we understand that marriage is a mystery, a sacrament, as some religions say - a sacred symbolic act. In order to grasp this sacred symbolic level, we need to set aside the modern penchant for scientific social analysis and instead look to sacred stories for instruction... stories that evoke a mythic imagination.*

While developmental and imaginal approaches to marriage may be linked to a soulful vision of a joyous and caring earthly life, some are linked to more transcendent or spiritual ideals.

The *transcendent or spiritual* approach to marriage sees it as a link with the divine. It places it in the spiritual realm where it is shaped by religious beliefs, rules and values. Thus some Christian churches stressing Paul's teaching about how marriage mirrors the love between Christ and his church stress the part marriage can play in uplifting marriage partners in their spiritual quest for God.

Social views

The social view of marriage sees it as a social institution; one of the major ways the fabric of society is held together. Not only do couples support each other, they raise their children as well as supporting their own parents. Marriage is an important economic unit which co-operatively cares for the welfare of its members. It is also a major cultural unit protecting and handing on commonly held values and customs to the next generation. Thus marriage is often thought to represent and promote major and sometimes controversial values such as monogamy and patriarchy on the one hand and altruism and forms of nurturing human service on the other.

The social view of marriage receives further determination from its religious and civic stakeholders. *Social religious* views of marriage are held and promoted by most churches. Marriage has been given special status through sacred wedding ceremonies. Christian marriage is classified as a sacred relationship through which the love of Christ and the church is symbolised. Christians entering marriage are also believed to be entering a special site of grace for mutual enrichment and support and for the continuance of the church in its children. Marriage is also seen as establishing new families in the church through which the church's numbers and culture will be built up.

Religious groups tend to share the three general characteristics of their ministers described by Johnson (1966) and developed by Waddell (1978:31) which were referred to in the previous study (Harris *et al.* 1992:18). Some churches are *prophetic* and call for conversion and commitment in their members. Couples in such religious traditions who enter marriage can expect to have their faith challenged by church members and be required to demonstrate conversion and commitment. Churches of the *priestly* type see marriage as ordered by ritual and religious customs. Couples in such religious traditions who enter marriage may be required to accept religious customs and practices governing marriage relationships and practices concerning things like gender roles within the marriage, birth control, and sexuality. Churches of the *professional* type will offer their members a chance to explore their marriage as an occasion for self actualisation and possibly emancipation.

Social / civic ideas of marriage are held by the state. Marriage is spoken about as the formal beginning of the family - the basic building block of the culture of contemporary society, providing support for the couple in good and bad times, nurture, control, protection for needy relatives and education for the young. The state is conscious of the effect on family life of marriage breakdown which in extremes can lead to forms of neglect, domestic violence, physical and sexual abuse.

Social / therapeutic ideas of marriage have emerged in relatively recent times. Under this perspective, marriage is perceived as a process susceptible to scientific analysis and therapy. Rose speaks of "the technique of marital therapy, which was to make the psychodynamic relations between wives and husbands a possible subject for professional analysis and management" (1989:171).

Such an approach can generate *functional* ideas about marriage and see it as made up of a network of exchanges and interactions. Marriage has interactive members, contractual arrangements, functional or dysfunctional processes within it. This 'cooled out' language is characteristic more of social workers and therapists than lovers and yet represents a real dimension of married life with its more rational needs of communication, planning, agreed use of resources and spaces, economics, ecological issues of health and the environment, etc.

The complexity and variety of the operational and interpretative demands surrounding marriage generate considerable learning challenges for the couple intending to marry.

Learning for Marriage

In each stage of the pathway of their common journey, couples find themselves confronted with many situations demanding considerable learning which they are invited to embrace as they share more and more of their lives together and as they begin to relate to others as a couple. For young people contemplating marriage, its development becomes one of their first significant adult learning projects which separates them from childhood and from dependence on parents.

Throughout their lives, adults engage in learning projects in the various arenas of their lives: work, religion, social relations, leisure. The intensity of engagement in learning varies over time. It is strongest at points of 'life transition' (Aslanian & Bricknell 1980, Schlossburg 1984, Willis 1992) such as entering or changing employment, becoming bereaved and of course marrying. The learning challenges associated with marriage are enormous since a person in choosing to become part of a couple chooses to cease being an independent individual and admit another person into intimate and permanent engagement. By doing this the man and the woman will be challenged in some way to shape the learning of their adult life and to engage with the ideas and learning of their partner. When the couple wish to marry, they will be required to meet with the church and/or state which, to a more or less extent, will engage them authoritatively and seek to shape their learning.

It is not uncommon that the learning which most adults pursue irregularly throughout their lives may receive various forms of intervention from all kinds of quarters. Thus the learning farmers pursue as they build up their store of knowledge over the years within particular approaches they may have adopted may be challenged by scientific evidence from a newspaper or extension course. There is always a question about whether learners will change their ways in the face of new ideas or whether they will resist them. To overcome resistance in a particular area, educators, skilled in community development and dialogic processes, are sometimes commissioned to spend time with members of a community and, once accepted, to develop culturally appropriate processes through which the proposed new learning can be addressed.

Pre-marriage education can often have the character of an intervention. If the celebrant urges a couple to attend a pre-marriage education program because he or she predicts it will assist their learning, this becomes something of an intervention into the learning the couples are already pursuing in their own way.

Before exploring the nature of pre-marriage education programs and the processes involved in offering them to all couples planning to marry, it is useful to consider the learning challenges which couples face in the operational phases of their pathway to marriage: becoming and being a couple and then getting married.

Learning to become and to be a couple

The early processes of becoming a couple tend to call upon the interpretative perspectives of the woman and man as they engage each other more deeply. The learning processes generated in this encounter are far from overt nor can they necessarily be addressed directly. In many ways they are to do with a person's basic attitudes and perhaps men and women attracted to each other will be consciously or unconsciously appraising how compatible their attitudes are to all the elements of a shared life. Learning in this phase may not be a matter of gaining skills or information but of gaining self knowledge and facility in decision making.

The processes of becoming a couple have major requirements: over time, issues may emerge in various dimensions of their relationship which will generate the need for growth in awareness and/or skills. There may be need for better ways of communicating, coming to decisions about things which affect them, developing a common culture of values, appropriate interpersonal and sexual manners, approaches to money, decisions about where to live, what to plan for and ways of resolving conflicts.

Being a couple has another set of learning requirements when located within the dynamics of the two families from which the members of the couple came. There will be things expected of couples and of a son and / or daughter in law in each family which can be occasions for considerable learning - to negotiate, to compromise and so on. Finally, there are also requirements placed on couples by the state once they marry or at least begin to function legally as a couple, which generate considerable need for learning. Dealing assertively with officialdom in church and state can be the first of many learning challenges of life together as a married couple and embryonic family.

All these learning challenges upon the man and woman form a natural part of the couple's emerging life together. Thus many forms of informal pre-marriage learning and education may be taking place before arrangements are made for a wedding which may shape the foundational ideas couples bring to later pre-marriage education programs sponsored or initiated by the celebrant.

Learning to marry

When the couple decide to marry, the new phase carries with it yet another set of learning requirements as their pathway to marriage enters the public stage of church and/or state each with its requirements. In general terms, marriage as a societal state is a move from the personalised private worlds of specific people to the rational world of public community administration in which legal and binding activities are carried out according to established criteria. These tend to be known to the celebrant but not necessarily in detail to the couples who need to be informed about these matters before

they can engage responsibly. This pathway from the private to the public world requires considerable knowledge and know-how even to discover the processes involved in getting married and the name and location of a suitable celebrant.

The engagement with the celebrant is a major influence on the last stages of the couple's pathway to marriage. As has been noted above, in many cases, the marriage celebrant may choose to extend his or her role from officiating at the wedding as the official witness of the state (and often the church as well) to include pastoral activities such as counselling and/or referral to a pre-marriage education program. These vary according to the culture of the particular church, from brief counselling sessions to organised programs.

Pre-marriage education programs

Pre-marriage education programs are one form of marriage education which has several versions. As was said in the previous study:

> *There are currently forms of marriage education for those preparing for marriage, those already married and those contemplating re-marriage. Pre-marriage education is directed at those couples who have made, or are in the process of making a decision to marry. These various forms of marriage education have their own objectives and style and have developed differently to meet their various goals* (Harris *et al.* 1992:18).

The previous study gave some background to earlier approaches to pre-marriage education programs which are useful in the current study.

> *In America, the term 'pre-marital counselling' was used in the medical context to describe the medical examination and the associated discussions on issues relating to sexuality and contraception that each individual would attend prior to marriage (Mudd 1957; Meschan 1964). The term was also used to describe programs of therapeutic intervention for distressed pre-marital couples, as well as educative programs which were attended by individuals or groups of couples. These programs dealt with issues such as sexual adjustment, marital roles, relationships with in-laws, wedding plans and religious concerns (Guldner 1971; Schumm and Denton 1979). This latter type of program has similarities with the Australian provision of pre-marriage education and is referred to by a variety of terms including pre-Cana, marriage preparation, marriage guidance and, more recently, pre-marriage education... Present day pre-marriage education usually takes groups of couples through a range of reflective exercises and information giving sessions aimed at increasing awareness, building skills, clarifying expectations and re-evaluating their decision to marry. Emphasis on the developmental phases of marriage and associated life crises may also be included with a strong preventative agenda* (Harris *et al.*1992:9).

Characteristics of existing pre-marriage education programs

In the light of the present enquiry into the implications of extending pre-marriage education to all couples intending to marry in Australia, there are three characteristics of existing pre-marriage education programs which are of significance here. They are linked to a church wedding and often strongly endorsed as virtually a component of it; they are offered within a context of church based pastoral care; and finally, they are shaped according to the basic orientation of the sponsoring church. While the first two characteristics have been discussed above, the third requires further development.

As was pointed out above, the approaches of the churches can be typified into three basic orientations: priestly, prophetic and professional. While it is hard to imagine a democratic state adopting a posture analogous to the priestly or prophetic style of some churches, the professional style does seem similar to approaches characteristic of the state's welfare function.

When it comes to exploring whether such a service would have relevance outside the church where it is currently offered, it is the professional approach which would seem to have the most relevance.

> *When marriage education is embedded within the welfare services of a church rather than other parts of its services, as for example it is in most Catholic dioceses, its agenda has tended to be shaped by concerns it has in common with this side of church activity. Concern for the real-life situation of couples and families, input from religious people who are also professional psychologists, welfare workers and educators and the extensive use of lay workers and volunteers have had a strong influence in the development of current pre-marriage education programs. Their non-intrusive style, couple-centred focus, emphasis on skilling and on helping couples get in touch with their own needs and dreams, reflect current development in the helping rather than ritual interests of the churches* (Harris *et al.* 1992:20).

At the same time as the welfare side of the church is highlighted, its capacity to command obedience is lessened. There remains an anomaly that the relatively high rate of attendance at pre-marriage education programs has been not so much because of their welfare function or style but because of their ritual authority. This leads to a consideration of what kind of secular version of pre-marriage education programs could be devised which would attract non-church related couples since it appears that these programs in their present form would fail to attract church related couples without the considerable influence of the celebrant's authority.

Participating in pre-marriage education programs

It is now possible to identify three important modes of participation in pre-marriage education programs emerging from earlier discussions, which characterise some couples' pathways to marriage. Some couples participate because the pre-marriage education program is perceived as a *de facto* component of the church wedding. Many couples particularly younger rather than older who decide they want to have a church wedding (although they may not be active members of a church) may agree to the strong recommendation, even requirement, of the celebrant as a component of the 'things they will be required to do' in the course of having a church wedding. Under this perspective, participation in pre-marriage education programs is perceived by participants as part of the ritual processes of the wedding and can be called *ritual participation*. The second form of participation, *religious participation*, occurs when religiously oriented couples attend a program seeking instruction and illumination about the religious dimensions of their planned marriage. While these two forms of participation are not suitable for extrapolation to the secular field and need to be acknowledged as such, couples who have no links with church sponsored pre-marriage education programs may participate in one as an adult education event. Under this perspective *educational* participation in a program is perceived by the couples as taking part in a facilitated learning event enriching their preparation and preventing unnecessary distress.

The following chapter looks at studies of participation in adult education programs which may offer some insights into the way couples approach enrolling in marriage education programs.

Chapter 2

Adult participation in education

Research studies in the field of adult education over a number of years provide valuable information on the likely participants in learning activities, their motivations, the barriers that might deter participation and the role of recruiters. These research findings provide a valuable backdrop for the issues that are the focus of this book.

Learner characteristics

A landmark study of American participation by Johnstone and Rivera (1965) identified age and schooling as major correlates to participation in adult education. They developed a profile of the typical adult participant that has been substantiated in a number of other American surveys (Merriam and Caffarella 1991:64). Their profile of the adult education participant is:

> *just as often a woman as a man, is typically under forty, has completed high school or more, enjoys an above average income, works full time and most often in a white-collar occupation, is married and has children, lives in an urbanised area but more likely in a suburb than a large city...* (p.8).

Anderson and Darkenwald (1979) found that the most significant factor in determining participation was age. Young adults were the most likely group within a population to attend courses or take up some form of study. Research by de Montlibert (1973) found that persons with higher levels of achievement in education participate consistently in more educational activities than those people who leave school early.

Studies in France by Hedoux (1982, cited in McGivney 1990) with mining communities in the lower socio-economic groups show there are some general characteristics that distinguish participants from non-participants. Participants in general are living in good material circumstances, have a fair degree of mobility and often involve themselves in a range of other community and social activities. Hedoux adds that, in addition to these circumstances, participation will only follow if the following factors are also present:

- they perceive a need to learn
- they are aware of courses that will meet this need
- they are ready and know how they will go about meeting this learning need
- they possess enough free time and autonomy to participate, and
- they possess the basic skills required in order to successfully complete the learning activity.

A 1977 report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) identified a number of groups who are largely non-participants in adult education. These include:

- unemployed young adults (especially premature school leavers)
- some people in rural areas
- immigrants
- the aged
- those persons living in poverty in urban areas
- unemployed and underemployed workers with little education
- some groups of women (housebound mothers, women from lower socio-economic backgrounds)
- people with language difficulties.

Australian data largely confirm these findings. A study initiated by the Technical and Further Education Commission in 1977 interviewed 2,500 persons in metropolitan Adelaide randomly chosen from the electoral rolls. In the report on this survey, Finnegan (1977:60) described the person most likely to enrol in an adult education class as being:

> *more likely to be female rather than male, is probably under thirty-six years of age, and is employed. She has reached a high level of schooling and is probably middle class.*

Motives for learning

Researchers have employed a number of methodologies for determining what motivates adults to participate in organised learning activities. Four approaches have been identified by Burgess (1971).

- **analysing the types of learning activities in which adults participate and trying to infer motives from these activities.**

A study by the National Opinion Centre (1965) reported attendance in terms of the categories of content that are covered in programs. Agriculture, religion, morals and ethics emerged as areas of interest for adult learners. A number of purposes were also identified including general education, home and family life and personal development.

- **asking adult learners to state in their own words why they chose to participate in a particular learning activity.**

Early studies from England, Wales and Scotland indicated that clusters of reasons emerge around six basic categories - the desire for knowledge and to give a wider outlook, for examination purposes, interest in study, useful occupation for leisure time, for recreation and for social reasons (Hoy 1933, Williams and Heath 1936).

- **presenting adult learners with a prepared list of reasons for attending a program and asking the learner to select the most appropriate reason for them.**

In one example of this type of study, Nicholson (1955) generated ten reasons why adults participate in a particular learning activity. These reasons were grouped in three major categories - economic and occupational, intellectual and cultural, and personal and social.

- **identifying the personal orientations that seem to motivate participation in learning activities.**

Houle (1961) developed a threefold typology that he used to classify learners and their motives: goal oriented learners, activity oriented learners and learners who participated for the joy of learning. Subsequent studies have enlarged on this framework. Burgess (1971) identified seven basic orientations: a desire to know, to reach a personal goal, to reach a social goal, to reach a religious goal, to take part in a social activity, to escape and to meet formal requirements. Morstain and Smart (1974) identified six clusters of reasons, differing from Burgess' study by the absence of religious motives and the inclusion of participation to meet external expectation and for social welfare reasons. Further work by Boshier (1971, 1976) and Boshier and Collins (1985) using Houle's typology, while verifying many of the findings of previous studies, reported that the typology was somewhat simplistic in its approach, particularly in relation to the activity orientated learners. Boshier's conclusions emphasise the complex nature of the factors that might lead to participation.

Further information in relation to the personal motivations that might lead to participation has been added by the work of Aslanain and Brickell (1980). In a study of 744 adult learners, 83% of respondents indicated that a specific life transition such as a change of job motivated them to start learning. While questioning the reliability of the findings of this study, Jarvis (1983:67) highlights

> *the significance of analysing the life-world of learners in order to understand both their motivation and their approach to learning.*

The findings generated by the available research on participants suggest that the reasons for non-participation may not always lie with the learner. Rather, barriers to participating in learning activities may stem from a combination of interpersonal, social and cultural factors which impact on an individual (Jarvis 1983). Identification of barriers to participation is an area that has attracted the interest of a number of researchers.

Barriers to participation

A number of studies have listed discrete reasons for non-participation in adult education. Major national surveys conducted in the United States and England have found that cost, lack of time, inconvenient timing of programs, lack of information about educational opportunities, job responsibilities, home responsibilities, lack of interest and lack of confidence are all significant barriers (Johnstone and Rivera 1965, Carp *et al.* 1974, Osborn *et al.* 1980).

Researchers have suggested classification schemes as a way of bringing some order to the many reasons adults give for non-participation. Cross (1981) developed a three-fold typology of barriers, which she labelled situational, institutional and dispositional. In her analysis of survey data on barriers to participation, Cross estimates that 10-50% of all barriers cited by respondents could be categorised as situational, 10-25% as institutional and 5-15% as dispositional. Situational barriers include factors such as family obligations, work responsibilities, poor health, lack of transport, lack of time, and cost. Institutional barriers emphasise the difficulties that the educational system itself presents would-be learners. The middle class character of many providers and institutions along with factors such as inconvenient timetabling of programs, fees and rigid entry requirements have been cited as affecting the decision to participate (Darkenwald 1980:6). Dispositional barriers are perhaps the most formidable for many people. How individuals perceive themselves, their ability to learn and the role of education in their lives can affect a person's willingness to enter a learning situation. While many of these beliefs may be more imagined than real, this does little to lessen their impact especially when these beliefs are reinforced by rigid educational institutions and pressure from peers and family.

Scanlan and Darkenwald (1984) used an empirical inductive process to determine the deterrents to participation. Using a scale designed especially for their study and a sample of 250 allied health professionals, they were able to identify six factors:

- disengagement (related to a person' general level of activity and involvement)
- lack of quality (of programs)
- family constraints
- cost
- lack of benefits (from the programs), and
- work constraints.

Their statistical analysis also indicated that these factors were potent predictors of participation.

The Deterrents to Participation Scale (DPS) developed by Scanlan and Darkenwald has been used in a number of other studies. Research conducted with 2000 households in New Jersey yielded six factors: lack of confidence, lack of course relevancy, time constraints, low personal priority, cost and personal factors (Darkenwald and

Valentine 1985). Further research using a sample of enlisted personnel at the Maxwell and Gunter Airforce Bases in Alabama has verified these factors (Martindale and Drake 1989). These studies demonstrate the development of a valid measure for determining the deterrents to participating in adult education.

The role of recruiters

Some studies emphasise the important role recruiters play in motivating participation. Ninety per cent of participants in the Appalachian Adult Education Project (a program providing adult basic education) stated they had learned of, or were motivated to attend, classes as a result of personal endorsement from a variety of personal contacts (Snyder 1971). The findings of this research also indicate that

> *in recording the effectiveness of various types of recruiters, [it was found] that trained basic education teachers - recruiters brought 57% of their contacts into the program. Lay recruiters brought in 28% and public school teachers only 18%* (Irish 1980: 48).

This overview of the research on participation in adult education, then, provides a backdrop for this study. The next section examines the available information on couples participating specifically in pre-marriage education programs.

Participants in pre-marriage education programs

Reliable data on the numbers and characteristics of couples who attend pre-marriage education programs have only begun to emerge in the last few years. While exact figures are not readily available, some evidence has suggested that approximately 12% of couples marrying attend pre-marriage education programs each year. Wolcott (1988:22) cites figures collected from organisations funded by the Attorney-General's Department that indicate that some 6,000 couples annually participate in programs provided by these organisations. In addition during 1987-88, 6,000 couples completed the PREPARE inventory as part of their preparation for marriage (Wolcott 1988). Australian Bureau of Statistics data indicate that there were 114,133 marriages in 1987 and 116,816 in 1988.

Comparative figures for 1991 show that 7,392 couples completed either the PREPARE or PREPARE-MC inventory (Craddock 1992). In the period July to December 1992, approximately 8,000 couples were reported to have attended pre-marriage education programs provided by agencies and groups funded by the Attorney-General's Department (1993). For the 1991 calendar year there were 113,869 marriages in Australia. On the basis of these data, a figure of 20% of couples currently attending pre-marriage education programs would appear to be a closer approximation.

Recent research has provided some insights into the typical pre-marriage education participant (Harris *et al*. 1992:82). Some characteristics of this person are the following:

- mid twenties
- engaged
- not been married previously
- known their partner for just over three years
- have Australasian-born parents
- have an income between $20,000 and $30,000
- most likely to be employed in a professional or semi-skilled occupation
- most likely to have Year 12 or a bachelor's degree as their highest level of education
- be planning to marry in a church.

This research also identified that religious marriage celebrants were the major source of information and the predominant referral agents for pre-marriage education programs. Eighty-six per cent of participants reported that they attended a program at the suggestion of their priest/marriage celebrant.

These characteristics of participants in pre-marriage education programs need to be considered in the light of the current social context in which marriage takes place. In Australia just under half of all marriages are conducted by civil marriage celebrants in a non-church setting and a third of marriages are second or subsequent marriages (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1992). Further, marriage is something that a majority of people expect to do at some stage in their life, regardless of their socio-economic or educational background (Millward 1991:28, Vandenheuvel 1991:8). It would not be difficult to conclude that the current provision of pre-marriage education tends to attract those who would be most likely to attend organised educational activities, whatever their focus, and that they are being utilised by only a small sample of all couples who are getting married.

Couples who present for pre-marriage education express a variety of motives for doing so. While many are eager and willing to avail themselves of the opportunity to learn about their relationship, others do not express these positive views. Marriage educators working in programs often indicate that couples view attendance at programs just as "another thing to do" in preparation for their wedding. Educators also report that couples are often reluctant and sometimes angry to have been "encouraged" by their marriage celebrant to attend. Celebrants, too, have reported that suggestions or requests to participate in some form of pre-marriage education are often met with a degree of resistance from couples. A variety of reasons have been offered to explain these observations.

Mace and Mace (1975) highlight three powerful restraining forces inherent in Western culture that discourage couples from seeking help for their relationship. Firstly, there is the myth of "naturalism", that a good marriage should be something that any normal adult can achieve (Clark 1973). Secondly, there is the belief that marriage is essentially a private matter (Mace and Mace 1976, Eastman 1992). While privacy is essential to the development of intimacy in a relationship, it can prevent couples in distressed relationships from admitting that they need help. During the period of engagement, in

particular, family and friends can reinforce the value of privacy by largely leaving the couple to their own devices where their relationship is concerned (Miller *et al.* 1976). Often this "hands-off" approach is not extended to the planning of the wedding! The third restraint is that of cynicism. Marriage is treated as a joke, where the couple are portrayed as unwitting victims, rather than as two individuals who have freely and willingly made a decision to commit themselves to each other. These three restraining forces give rise to what Mace and Mace (1975) have identified as the "inter marital taboo". Supported and promoted by society, this taboo restrains the couple from admitting that there is any need to work on their relationship. It provides a powerful disincentive for the couple to attend programs such as pre-marriage education since attendance is seen as equivalent to admitting there is some doubt about the relationship.

The role of marriage celebrants in acting as a referral agent for pre-marriage education programs is also significant. Marriage celebrants work directly with couples in preparing them for their marriage ceremony in a relationship that would provide opportunities for couples to be introduced to the concept of pre-marriage education. The important place of celebrants within their communities and their central role in couples' wedding ceremonies in Australia makes them a potential source of referral to pre-marriage education programs. Data from a previous study (Harris *et al.* 1992) would support the fact that, for a majority of couples, the pathway to pre-marriage education programs is mediated by their marriage celebrant.

The case for increasing participation

Literature from the adult education field suggests that the factors that affect participation in pre-marriage education are likely to be multifaceted. However, it must be borne in mind that the adult education studies have largely been conducted with *individuals* who were considering situations where they would be *voluntary* learners, in *organised group learning activities*. Pre-marriage education programs, by contrast, involve **couples** learning together, often participating **under some duress**, in either a **group setting or on a one-to-one basis** with a marriage educator, marriage celebrant or other professional. These important differences, both in the nature of the learning endeavour and in the nature of the client group, will influence the type of barriers which couples might name as deterring them from participation in pre-marriage education programs. The role of the marriage celebrant in either encouraging or discouraging couples to attend programs is also a factor that warrants further consideration.

This review of the literature on participation provides a background for the research that is the basis of this book. The description of the study now begins with an outline of its planning and design.

Part 2

The study

Chapter 3

Designing the research

In order to collect information on the factors which might affect couples' decisions to participate in pre-marriage education the research was designed to consist of two separate but interrelated stages. The first stage of the project was concerned with marriage celebrants and the role they play in encouraging couples to attend pre-marriage education. The couples' perceptions of pre-marriage education and the factors which might deter them from participating in programs formed the focus of the second stage.

This chapter outlines the research objectives and the methodologies selected for these two stages and provides details on the response rates for celebrants and couples.

Research objectives

For the purposes of the first stage of the study the celebrants were divided into those who refer and those who do not. Each cohort was thought to have complementary contributions to the research. Preliminary anecdotal evidence suggested there were three linked variables contained in the celebrant's recommendation of a pre-marriage education program. The first was how much the programs were valued, the second was how much was known about them and the third was the way in which the celebrant referred individual couples to the programs they supported (that is, was it a blanket recommendation for all couples or to certain couples selected according to various criteria). The same questions were put to non-referring celebrants together with additional questions to determine whether the non-referral was because the celebrant disapproved, because he or she did not know about pre-marriage education programs or whether, knowing about them, he or she felt that the programs would not suit a particular couple.

The detailed research objectives for the first stage of the project can be summarised as follows:

1 to describe the sample of marriage celebrants participating in the research project in terms of a range of characteristics, and

2 to describe the current referral practices of marriage celebrants.

The research objectives relating to marriage celebrants who did not refer couples to pre-marriage education programs were:

3 to analyse celebrants' opinions of pre-marriage education programs;

4 to analyse celebrants' attitudes to referring couples to programs;

5 to determine celebrants' perspectives on potential barriers that might deter couples from attending programs; and

6 to determine the circumstances under which celebrants might refer couples to programs.

The second stage of the study was to explore factors identified by anecdotal evidence concerning couples' attitudes to and participation in pre-marriage education programs. It was hypothesised that couples' pathways to marriage might be mediated by a number of factors. Couples' awareness of pre-marriage education programs and attitudes towards their perceived usefulness and suitability for them could have a significant impact on whether couples elected to attend a program. Secondly, it was likely that a range of deterrents, encompassing institutional, dispositional and relationship-orientated factors, could also affect a couple's willingness to participate in a program. Thirdly, as with the marriage celebrants, couples' beliefs about the types of programs they might like to attend was also seen as providing a useful perspective on the issue of factors which might affect participation.

Given these issues the objectives for the second stage of the project were:

7 to identify and describe a sample of couples who presented to be married within a given period of time in 1993;

8 to determine couples' awareness of pre-marriage education programs; and

9 to describe couples' participation in programs prior to their marriage.

In addition, the following objectives were identified for couples who did not attend a pre-marriage education program prior to their marriage:

10 to identify and describe the deterrents which couples believed prevented them from attending programs; and

11 to describe the circumstances under which couples might elect to participate in pre-marriage education and the nature of the programs they would like to attend.

Research method

Due to the current lack of literature directly related to the topic the research was designed to be largely descriptive, aiming to search out facts rather than attempt to explore the reasons for them. Given this restriction the researchers decided to use two related questionnaire surveys - the first for celebrants and the second for couples.

The questionnaire for the celebrants was designed to contain a number of open-ended questions and a scale specifically to collect data relating to marriage celebrants' perceptions of pre-marriage education programs and the types of programs to which they might refer couples. A question was also included on information about the marriage celebrants on a range of socio-demographic variables (see Appendix A).

The questionnaire for the couples (see Appendix B) was to be sent to them after their wedding. It sought to determine, retrospectively, their ideas on pre-marriage education and their involvement in programs prior to their wedding. It contained questions to elicit information on a number of demographic variables such as age, education level, employment status, marital status and living arrangements prior to marriage. Information was sought on couples' knowledge of pre-marriage education and their participation in programs.

Couples **who had attended** programs were asked to supply information on the nature of the program, the source of referral to it and their opinion of its usefulness. Couples who **had known** about pre-marriage education programs but had elected **not to attend** were asked to complete parts of the questionnaire which sought to elicit information on factors which might have influenced their non-participation. Part of the questionnaire included a modified version of the Deterrents to Participation Scale (Darkenwald and Scanlan 1984). Twenty one of the original scale items were selected for inclusion in the questionnaire. Others of the original scale items were re-worded to make them more applicable to pre-marriage education programs (for example, "Because we could not afford the course fees" replaced the item "Because I could not afford the registration or course fees"). Some items were omitted because they were seen to be irrelevant to the current study (for example, "Because my employer would not provide financial assistance or reimbursement"). In addition to these items, a further eleven items were added. These additional items were designed to capture couples' perceptions of some of the deterrents to participation which are of particular relevance to pre-marriage education programs.

These were:

- Because I believe it is best for us as a couple to sort out our own problems
- Because my partner did not want to go
- Because I did not want to discuss personal issues with other people
- Because we did not have any problems in our relationship
- Because my partner and I had lived together before we married

- Because I thought the program would have a lot of religion in it
- Because I have been married before
- Because our priest / minister did not encourage us to attend
- Because my partner has been married before
- Because I thought that the program would raise sensitive issues that we had not dealt with
- Because I don't think that we needed to go to a program about marriage.

Couples who had not attended a pre-marriage education program were asked to give their opinions on the type of programs they might consider attending, if they were to participate in them. Non-attending couples were also asked to comment on other factors they believed to be important when providing pre-marriage education programs.

Couples who indicated that they had **no knowledge** of pre-marriage education programs were asked to complete those sections of the questionnaire relating to the types of programs they might have been likely to attend.

Asking the celebrants

The sample of marriage celebrants to be invited to participate in the research were drawn from lists of marriage celebrants provided by the Office of Legal Aid and Family Services within the Attorney-General's Department. The lists supplied were dated 1 January 1992, and were compiled by the Department during the previous year. They contained all celebrants who were registered to perform marriages under the Marriage Act regardless of whether they were actively involved in carrying out this function. It was too difficult and time-consuming to identify only those celebrants who were performing marriages at the time of the study.

The following three steps were then taken to determine the sample to be drawn from the general population of marriage celebrants.

1 The numbers of celebrants in each of the Catholic, Anglican, Uniting Church, Presbyterian, Orthodox, Baptist, Lutheran and Church of Christ denominations and the numbers of civil celebrants in each state and territory of Australia were determined from the lists provided. The decision to limit the sample to these groups of celebrants was based on the fact that these groups perform the greater percentage of weddings conducted in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1992).

2 The percentages of weddings performed by each of the different categories of celebrant described in (1) were calculated (see Appendix C). These same percentages were then used to determine the numbers of celebrants to be selected in the sample. It was noted that the civil celebrants as a group in each state performed a far higher percentage of the total weddings than did their religious counterparts. It was therefore decided to include all civil marriage celebrants in the sample.

3 The number of religious celebrants from the chosen denominations to be recruited to match the number of civil celebrants was calculated from the proportion of marriages performed by members of these denominations. The results of these calculations are given in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1
The sample of marriage celebrants by state/territory and religious/civil affiliation

Denomination of Celebrant	NSW	Vic	Qld	Tas	SA	WA	NT	ACT
Catholic	164	97	54	10	38	46	16	15
Anglican	129	66	62	17	21	31	6	9
Uniting Church	85	56	48	6	41	19	13	5
Presbyterian	23	6	9	1	1	1	-	2
Orthodox	26	23	2	1	8	2	1	1
Baptist	15	9	8	3	5	4	1	1
Lutheran	3	4	10	1	12	1	3	1
Church of Christ	5	8	5	1	5	4	-	1
Civil Celebrants	263	171	164	27	69	110	13	14
Total	713	440	362	67	200	218	53	49

A total of 2102 celebrants was selected at random from the lists provided to the researchers.

Celebrants' response rate

The questionnaire was sent to the selected celebrants over a two week period in April of 1993. A total of 601 (28.6%) questionnaires was received during the three week period allocated for their return. Of these, 547 questionnaires were useable, giving a return rate of 26%. The difference between the returned numbers and useable numbers of questionnaires was due to incompletely filled in questionnaires and sets of responses which indicated an inability to complete the questionnaire due to changed employment circumstances (for example, the celebrant had not been engaged in work or ministry where he or she was required to perform weddings).

Asking the couples

The sample of couples invited to participate in the research was drawn from the records of the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales. These states were selected on the basis of ease of access (in the case of South Australia) and the two states where the most weddings were registered in 1992. Ethical considerations required that the Registries, as holders of information relating to the couples, contact the couples in the first instance. Direct contact between the couples and the researchers was only to occur *after* the couples had indicated their willingness to participate in the study.

It was estimated that 7,000 recently married couples would need to be contacted and invited to participate in order to achieve a final sample size of about 1,000 couples. Using the percentages of weddings performed in each of the states, it was determined that 3,600 couples would be invited from the New South Wales, 2,600 couples from Victoria and 850 couples from South Australia.

The following procedure was used to obtain the sample of couples.

1 The Principal Registrars in each of the states were contacted to seek their willingness to participate in the research.

2 Bundles of envelopes containing a letter outlining the research and reply paid response card were sent to each office.

3 Couples wed between the period January and September 1993 were sent an envelope.

4 The couples, on receipt of the information, were requested to complete the response card indicating their willingness to participate in the research and return it directly to the University of South Australia.

5 Questionnaires were then sent to the participating couples for completion.

Couples' response rate

Invitations to participate from the three Registry Offices were sent to couples over the August - October period in 1993. Questionnaires were forwarded to couples progressively over a six month period until February 1994, with the data collection period being completed by March. During this time 1,516 persons (758 couples) indicated their willingness to participate in the research project. Completed questionnaires were received from 1,148 respondents (75%), of which 1,127 were useable (74%). The difference between the numbers of returned and useable questionnaires was due to incomplete questionnaires and the withdrawal of some couples or one member of a couple from the research.

Table 3.2 gives details of the distribution of the respondents by state. It needs to be borne in mind that these statistics were collated from the response cards and reflect the current place of residence of the couple. The "other" category comprises couples who had moved to other states in Australia or overseas since their marriage.

Table 3.2
Distribution of respondents by state of residence after marriage

State	Number of respondents	
	n	%
New South Wales	505	44.8
Victoria	450	39.9
South Australia	150	13.3
Other	22	2.0
Total	1127	100

This chapter has described the research design for the collection of data for the study. It has outlined a two-stage research design to collect data from the marriage celebrants and recently married couples, and has described questionnaires designed to collect data relating to each group's views of pre-marriage education programs, the reasons for non-attendance and the types of programs which might be attended. The next chapter describes in more detail the couples and the marriage celebrants who participated in the research study.

Chapter 4

Profiles of the respondents

Chapter 3 has explained how this study was conceived in two separate but interrelated stages involving first, marriage celebrants and the role they play in influencing couples' extent of participation in pre-marriage education, and secondly, newly married couples and their perceptions of the role of pre-marriage education and potential barriers to participation in it. Before moving to the perspectives of these two groups, however, it is important that the samples participating in this research are analysed and the extent of representativeness of these samples of their respective populations is determined. Viewpoints analysed later in this book can then be interpreted in the light of this background information.

This chapter is divided for the sake of clarity into two sections. The first section focuses on the celebrants, the second section on the couples. The chapter concludes with a summary of both groups of respondents.

The Celebrants

Research objective 1 (Chapter 3) was to identify and describe the sample of marriage celebrants in terms of a number of characteristics. The following section analyses the sample in its entirety - 547 respondents - as well as by type of celebrant.

Sex

Slightly more than three quarters of all the respondent celebrants were male, and one quarter were female. Almost all of the female celebrants were civil rather than religious celebrants.

Table 4.1
Sex of the civil and religious celebrants

	Entire sample		Civil celebrants		Religious celebrants	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Male	416	76.1	118	50.4	296	95.2
Female	111	20.3	103	44.0	8	2.6
Not specified	20	3.7	13	5.6	9	2.3

Age

The celebrants were distributed across the various age brackets. The majority (76%) were between 36 and 65 years of age. Only five percent were younger than 35 (almost all of these were religious celebrants). Almost a fifth were over 65 years, more evenly divided between civil and religious.

Table 4.2
Age of the civil and religious celebrants

	Entire sample		Civil celebrants		Religious celebrants	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
26-35	27	4.9	2	0.9	25	8.1
36-45	104	19.2	33	14.2	71	23.1
46-55	154	28.5	60	25.8	94	30.5
56-65	154	28.5	85	36.5	69	22.4
65+	102	18.9	53	22.7	49	15.9
Missing	6	-	1	-	5	-

Occupation

Sixty percent categorised themselves in the professional group, with almost all of the religious celebrants giving this response. The other main category were the "retired" (17%), comprising a high 35% of the civil but only 7% of the religious celebrants. All but three of the respondents in the other occupational categories were civil celebrants.

Table 4.3
Occupations of the civil and religious celebrants

	Entire sample		Civil celebrants		Religious celebrants	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Professional	326	60.5	41	20.4	285	92.5
Administration/ Management	34	6.3	33	16.4	1	0.3
Clerical/Sales	32	5.9	30	14.8	2	0.6
Trade	11	2.0	11	5.4	0	-
Unskilled	1	0.2	1	0.5	0	-
Home duties	15	2.7	15	7.4	0	-
Retired	91	16.8	71	35.1	20	6.5
Missing/not stated	37	-	32	-	5	-

Language spoken at home

Ninety six percent (n=525) of the celebrants reported that English was the language spoken in their home. There was no difference in the proportions of civil and religious celebrants responding in this way. Other languages reported to be the language spoken in the home were: Spanish (5), Greek (3), Arabic (2), Dutch (2), German (1), Lao (1), Macedonian (1), Maltese (1), Romanian (1) and Tongan (1).

Residence

The sample of celebrants came from a range of differently sized towns and cities. Almost half were from large cities, comprised of 54% of the religious group and 34% of the civil group. Sixteen percent were from smaller cities, while 38% (almost half of the civil group) were resident in towns of less than 25,000 people.

Table 4.4
Residence of the civil and religious celebrants

	Entire sample		Civil celebrants		Religious celebrants	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Small town < 2,500	77	14.3	38	16.8	39	12.6
Town 2,500-25,000	131	23.9	71	31.4	59	19.1
Small City	85	15.5	42	18.1	43	13.9
Large City (>100,000)	244	44.6	76	33.6	168	54.4
Missing	10	-	8	-	2	-

Just over half (54%) of the respondents were from NSW/ACT and Victoria, while the smaller States and the NT had correspondingly fewer respondents (refer to Table 4.7 later).

Type of celebrant

Forty three percent (234) of the respondents were civil celebrants. Of the 313 (57%) religious celebrants, the greatest number were from the Anglican denomination (101), followed by the Catholic (78) and Uniting churches (70). Much smaller numbers came from the other mainline Christian churches (refer to Table 4.8 later).

Years as a marriage celebrant

The mean time the respondents had been serving as marriage celebrants was 16.2 years (median 13 years). The distribution of years of service through decade categories is outlined in Table 4.5. A marked difference between the two types of celebrants is clearly evident. The civil celebrants were far less experienced in terms of length of service, with 67% compared with only 2% of religious celebrants having served 10 years or less in that capacity. Two-thirds of the latter had served between 11 and 40 years.

Table 4.5
Years as a marriage celebrant

	Entire sample		Civil celebrants		Religious celebrants	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
0-10 years	230	42.5	154	66.7	76	2.2
11-20	154	28.4	73	31.6	81	26.1
21-30	74	13.8	3	1.3	71	22.9
31-40	59	10.9	1	0.4	58	18.7
41-50	16	2.9	0	-	16	5.2
51-60	7	1.3	0	-	7	2.2
61+	1	0.2	0	-	1	0.3
Missing	6					

Number of weddings performed in 1991 and 1992

A measure of the extent of their activity as marriage celebrants was obtained by asking for the number of weddings they had performed over the past two years (refer to Table 4.6). The data show that about 12-14% had performed no weddings in these years, most of this inactive group being religious celebrants. About the same proportion of respondents had performed over 50 weddings, in this case almost all being civil celebrants. Thus the civil celebrants, though they had served less years in that role, performed far more weddings. Most of the celebrants had performed between 1 and 25 weddings in each of these two years.

Table 4.6
Number of weddings performed in 1991 and 1992

Number of Weddings	1991 Entire sample n	%	Civil celebrants n	%	Religious celebrants n	%	1992 Entire sample n	%	Civil celebrants n	%	Religious celebrants n	%
0	70	12.8	16	6.8	54	17.2	65	11.9	6	2.6	59	18.8
1 - 5	160	29.2	32	13.7	128	40.9	147	26.9	23	9.8	124	39.6
6 - 10	88	16.1	30	12.8	58	18.5	76	13.9	14	6.0	62	19.8
11 - 15	46	8.4	17	7.6	29	9.3	54	9.9	24	10.2	30	9.6
16 - 20	25	4.6	10	4.3	15	4.8	23	4.2	13	5.5	10	3.2
21 - 25	20	3.6	12	5.1	8	2.5	15	2.7	10	4.3	5	1.6
26 - 50	47	8.6	37	15.8	10	3.2	73	13.3	62	26.5	11	3.5
51 - 100	43	7.9	42	17.9	1	0.3	45	8.2	44	18.8	1	0.3
101 - 150	11	2.0	11	4.7	0	-	13	2.4	12	5.1	1	0.3
151 - 200	5	0.9	5	2.1	0	-	6	1.1	6	2.6	0	-
200 +	4	0.7	4	1.7	0	-	4	0.7	4	1.7	0	-
Missing	28		18		10		26		16		10	

Representativeness of the celebrant sample

The numbers of respondents varied between states/territories. Table 4.7 gives details of the respondents by state/territory and the type of marriage celebrant (religious or civil)

Table 4.7
Respondents by state/territory and type of marriage celebrant

State	Religious n	% of sample of religious celebrants	Civil n	% of sample of civil celebrants
NT	9	2.9	4	1.7
NSW/ACT	109	34.8	77	32.9
VIC	55	17.6	48	20.5
QLD	48	15.3	41	17.5
SA	37	11.8	20	8.5
WA	35	11.2	28	12.0
TAS	12	3.8	10	4.3
Missing	8	-	6	-
	313	57.2 (of total sample)	234	42.8 (of total sample)

Figures in Table 4.7 reveal that 57.2 % of the respondents were religious marriage celebrants, while the remaining 42.8% were civil marriage celebrants.

The proportion of civil celebrants to religious celebrants who responded to the questionnaire is an important factor in determining the representativeness of the sample, since the numbers of weddings performed by each group was used as a basis for the initial calculations of the sample size. Australian Bureau of Statistics (1992) figures show that in 1991 all religious celebrants collectively performed 58.7 % (n = 66,849) of all weddings in Australia. In the same period, civil marriage celebrants performed 36,260 (31.8%) weddings in Australia. From these figures it can be concluded that civil marriage celebrants are slightly over-represented in the sample.

Further evidence on the representativeness of this research sample can be drawn from a number of other sources.

An examination of the figures of the percentages of weddings performed by celebrants in each of the eight religious denominations and the civil marriage celebrants, compared with the percentage of questionnaire respondents, reveals that these percentages do approximate each other. There is, however, a larger discrepancy between these figures for the Catholic, Anglican and civil marriage celebrants than for the remaining categories (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8
Respondents by denomination and number of weddings performed in 1991

Celebrant category	No. of respondents	% of total number of respondents	% of weddings performed by category of celebrant in 1991
Civil	234	42.8	31.8
Church of Christ	9	1.6	1.1
Lutheran	14	2.6	1.1
Baptist	17	3.1	1.7
Orthodox	7	1.3	2.5
Presbyterian	11	2.0	1.6
Uniting	70	12.8	10.2
Anglican	101	18.5	13.3
Catholic	78	14.2	20.5
Missing	6	-	-

The conclusion from these data is that the sample, while containing a slight over-representation of civil celebrants, and minor variations between the religious denominations, is largely representative of the population from which it was drawn. This conclusion is based on the percentage of weddings performed by each of the

different categories of celebrants, and the approximation of this with the proportions of respondents from each of the categories of celebrant (see page 23).

The Couples

Research objective 7 (Chapter 3) was to identify and describe a sample of couples who presented to be married within a given period of time in 1993. The following section analyses this sample of 564 men and 563 women in terms of a number of characteristics.

Age

Seventy percent of the couple sample was aged between 20 and 35 years. Another quarter (26%) were in the 36 to 55 age bracket. Across Australia, the median age at first marriage for both men and women has increased by just over three years between 1972 and 1992. In 1972, the figures were 23.3 years for men and 21.0 years for women. By 1992, the equivalent figures were 26.9 years for men and 24.7 years for women. In 1992 the median age for all bridegrooms was 28.7 and for all women marrying it was 26.3 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1993:1). Direct comparisons on median age cannot be made with this study's sample because age was recorded only in age brackets.

Table 4.9
Age

Age bracket	female	male	n	%
Under 20	8	2	10	0.9
20-25	201	138	339	30.2
26-35	208	244	452	40.3
36-45	90	102	192	17.1
46-55	43	51	94	8.4
56-65	7	17	24	2.1
Over 65	3	8	11	1.1
Missing	3	2	5	1.1
Total			1127	100

Occupation

The largest single category was the "professional", which accounted for one quarter (26%) of the sample. The remaining respondents were spread across the various occupational categories, with 15% in the trades, 12% in sales and personal services and 11% in clerical occupations. The sample included 12% who were not in the paid workforce as well as 4% who were students.

Table 4.10
Occupation

Occupational category	female	male	n	%
Clerical	105	23	128	11.4
Managerial	43	101	144	12.8
Professional	158	138	296	26.3
Sales and personal services	80	49	129	11.5
Student	27	16	43	3.8
Trade	34	133	167	14.9
Not in paid workforce	98	42	140	12.4
Other	18	60	78	6.9
Missing		2	2	
Total			1127	100

Highest educational level completed

There was an even spread of respondents across the various levels of education. Forty one percent had not completed study beyond secondary schooling, while 36% possessed a tertiary diploma or higher.

Table 4.11
Highest educational level completed

Highest educational level completed	Female	Male	n	%
Year 11 or less	146	133	279	24.9
Year 12	96	89	185	16.4
Trade/apprencticeship	19	94	113	10.1
Certificate from TAFE/ business college	91	53	144	12.8
Tertiary diploma	65	55	120	10.7
Bachelor's degree	96	102	198	17.6
Postgraduate diploma or higher degree	50	35	85	7.5
Missing		3	3	-
Total	563	564	1127	100

Religion

Just over one fifth (22%) of the couple sample stated they had no religion. The two main denominations were Catholic (24%) and Anglican (19%); these proportions approximate those in the Australian population in general.

Table 4.12
Religion

Stated religion	n	%
None	251	22.4
Anglican	217	19.4
Baptist	31	2.8
Catholic	274	24.4
Churches of Christ	13	1.2
Lutheran	18	1.6
Orthodox	30	2.7
Presbyterian	42	3.7
Uniting Church	94	8.4
Other	151	13.5
Missing	6	-
Total	1127	100

Length of marriage

Three quarters (76%) of the sample of couples had been married for eight or nine months at the time of the survey. The range spread from seven to 25 months, with a mean length of marriage of 9.28 months.

Table 4.13
Length of marriage in months

Length of marriage in months	n	%
7	36	3.2
8	375	33.4
9	477	42.4
10	70	6.2
11	12	1.1
12	3	0.3
13	132	11.7
14	12	1.1
15	2	0.2
16	2	0.2
22*	1	0.1
25*	2	0.2
Missing	3	-
Total	1127	100

* Given that the maximum time between marriage and questionnaire completion would have been 16 months (from January 1993 to April 1994), either the three respondents recorded as 22 and 25 months miscalculated the period or they were incorrectly coded.

Previously divorced/widowed

One quarter (n= 287; 25.4%) of the couple sample had been previously divorced, comprising 145 females and 142 males. A small proportion of respondents (n=34; 2.9%) had been widowed - 16 females and 18 males.

The proportion who had been previously divorced was the same as for all Australian marriages in 1991 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1994: 9). In 1971, less than 10% of all marriages were remarriages for both men and women, but this proportion rose to almost 25% of all marriages in 1976 and has remained at this level. The change in divorce laws in 1975 resulted in an increase in the proportion of remarriages registered after that year.

Living arrangement immediately before marriage

Just over one half (56%; n= 640) of the couple sample reported that they had lived with their partner immediately before their marriage. One quarter lived with their parents.

The proportion of 56% living with their partner before marriage is the same as in the Australian population marrying in 1992 (the most recent national statistics available). The Australian Bureau of Statistics indicates that, of marriages registered in 1992, 56% were preceded by a period of de facto living; this compares with 16% of marriages beginning in 1975 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1994: 1).

Table 4.14
Residence immediately before marriage

Residence before marriage	n	%
With your parents	270	23.5
With your partner	640	55.6
With others	108	9.4
Other	133	11.6
Total	1151*	100

* Some respondents gave more than one answer for this question

Country of birth of self, mother and father

Eight of every ten of the couple respondents were born in Australia. The proportions of parents who were Australian-born were less, 64% of mothers and 60% of fathers. One in ten parents was born in England. The "Other" category for the couple sample, accounting for only 9%, was comprised of 46 other countries.

Table 4.15
Country of birth of self, mother and father

Country of birth	Self		Mother		Father	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Australia	893	79.4	724	64.2	677	60.3
England	62	5.5	115	10.2	122	10.9
New Zealand	30	2.7	32	2.8	29	2.6
Germany	11	1.0	18	1.6	21	1.9
Scotland	14	1.2	20	1.8	27	2.4
Italy	2	0.2	33	2.9	42	3.7
Greece	6	0.5	20	1.8	23	2.0
Holland	6	0.5	14	1.2	19	1.7
Vietnam	9	0.8	7	0.6	5	0.4
Other	97	8.6	144	12.8	157	14.0
Missing	3		-		5	
Total	1127	100	1127	100	1127	100

In comparison with all marriages in Australia in 1992 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1993: 12-13), this sample is slightly over-represented for Australian-born (76%). It is quite likely that respondents born in this country felt more comfortable in agreeing to participate in this research and completing a questionnaire in the English language. Nevertheless, the difference of 3% is not marked, and the sample may be considered broadly representative in terms of country of birth.

Size of town/city lived in immediately before marriage

The couple respondents came from a range of differently sized towns and cities, with 30% coming from rural and town areas - the same proportion as in the celebrant sample. Over half (55%) came from small cities. This proportion was in direct contrast to the celebrant sample, of whom 54% had come from large cities.

Table 4.16
Size of town/city lived in immediately before marriage

Size of town/city	n	%
Small town (< 2,500)	114	11.4
Town (2,500-25,000)	188	18.7
Small city (up to 100,000)	550	54.8
Large city (> 100,000)	152	15.1
Missing	123	
Total	1127	100

Representativeness of the couple sample

This sample was obtained from Registries in NSW, Victoria and SA of couples marrying in those states during particular periods of 1993. As a random cross-section of couples, it might be expected that this sample would be broadly representative of those marrying in Australia. Comparable characteristics are available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics on previous divorce, *de facto* living before marriage and country of birth; on each of these characteristics, this conclusion can be substantiated.

Summary

Celebrants

This section has highlighted some marked differences in the profiles of the two types of marriage celebrant.

The civil group comprised almost even numbers of women and men; 85% were over 45 years of age, with 23% being 65 and over; they spread across occupational groupings, with 20% professional and 35% retired; half resided in towns (less than 25,000); two-thirds had served as a celebrant for 10 years or less; and about 12% had performed over 50 weddings in each of the past two years.

In contrast, the religious group was almost all male; 69% were over 45 years of age, with 16% being 65 and over; 93% classified themselves as professional, with 6% retired; over half resided in large cities (over 100,000); a mere 2% had served as a celebrant for 10 years or less; and around 11% were inactive and virtually none had performed over 50 weddings in each of the past two years.

Thus the civil celebrants were more heterogeneous in gender and occupation, younger, more "countrified", far less experienced in years of service as a celebrant and yet far more active in numbers of weddings performed, than their religious counterparts.

These differences in profile characteristics might be expected to provide part explanation for some of the differences in the patterns of responses given by the two types of celebrant. Part three, comprising Chapters 5, 6 and 7 will focus on the referral practices of these celebrants and their perpectives on the types of pre-marriage education programs they would prefer.

Couples

This section has described the sample obtained from Registries in NSW, Victoria and SA of couples marrying in those states during particular periods of 1993.

Seventy percent of the sample were aged between 20 and 35 years, with another 17% between 36 and 45 years. The largest single occupational category was the professional (26%), with a relatively even spread across the remaining occupational categories. Twelve percent were not in paid workforce and 4% were students. There was also an even spread across educational levels completed. Forty one percent did not complete an award beyond secondary school (25% with Year 11 or less), while 36% possessed a tertiary diploma or higher qualification.

The two most common denominations represented were Catholic (24%) and Anglican (19%), while just over one fifth (22%) stated they had no religious affiliation. The mean length of marriage at the time of the survey was 9.28 months. One quarter had been previously divorced and 3% had been previously widowed. Fifty six percent had lived with their partner immediately prior to their marriage, while one quarter had lived with their parents. Seventy nine percent of the sample were Australian-born, compared with 64% of their mothers and 60% of their fathers. Just over half had resided immediately before marriage in small cities of between 25,000 and 100,000 people.

Given that this sample broadly represents couples marrying in Australia, their responses concerning participation in various forms of pre-marriage education, barriers to participation in pre-marriage education programs, potential usefulness of such participation and preferences on the type of programs they would have liked to have attended if they were to have participated, carry some currency in the exploration of potential pathways through pre-marriage education to marriage. Part four, Chapters 8, 9 and 10 will further examine the couples' perspectives on these issues.

Part 3

The celebrants' perspectives

Chapter 5

Marriage celebrants and pre-marriage education

The marriage celebrants described in the previous chapter are a very diverse group, representing sections of the Australian community who hold a range of views on marriage. These views, often reinforced by religious beliefs and values, give rise to a number of approaches to the question of whether couples preparing for marriage should attend some form of pre-marriage education. This chapter takes up this question by exploring the referral practices of marriage celebrants who either use pre-marriage education programs or provide programs of their own.

Celebrants who refer couples to pre-marriage education

Research objective 2 (Chapter 3) was to describe the current referral practices of the sample of marriage celebrants. The respondents were asked whether they had encouraged or recommended couples to attend a pre-marriage education program in the past. Forty one percent (n=224) of the total sample claimed that they had done so. The remaining 59% (n=323) indicated they had not encouraged couples to attend programs conducted by some group or organisation other than themselves. This section describes the various referral activities for the sample of civil and religious celebrants.

The 41% of celebrants who indicated that they **had** encouraged or recommended couples to attend a pre-marriage education program comprised 66 civil and 158 religious celebrants. Half of the religious celebrants in the sample encouraged couples to attend pre-marriage education programs offered by providers other than themselves, compared with just over a quarter of the civil celebrants (28%).

A comparison between the place of residence of the celebrant and whether they had encouraged couples to attend pre-marriage education programs revealed a significant difference. Celebrants who lived in cities were more likely to encourage couples to attend a pre-marriage education program than celebrants who lived in towns and remote areas. These data are reported in the following table.

Table 5.1
Celebrants who have encouraged couples to attend pre-marriage education programs by place of residence of celebrant

Place of residence of celebrant	Celebrants who have encouraged couples		Total sample of celebrants	
	n	%	n	%
Town up to 25,000	58	25.9	208	38.0
City over 25,000	162	72.3	329	60.2
Missing	4	1.8	10	1.8
Total	224	100.0	547	100.0

Frequency of referral by celebrants

Just under one half of the referring celebrants had encouraged between one and 10 couples to attend pre-marriage education programs in each of the previous two years. The following table describes the patterns of referral carried out by celebrants in 1991 and 1992. In some cases celebrants did not refer couples in each year.

Table 5.2
Frequency of referral by celebrants

Number of couples referred	1991 celebrants		1992 celebrants	
	n	%	n	%
0	26	11.6	30	13.4
1-10	110	49.1	104	46.4
11-20	32	14.3	37	16.5
21-40	18	8.0	16	7.1
41-50	6	2.8	2	0.9
51-100	9	4.0	11	4.9
101-150	3	1.3	3	1.3
151+	1	0.4	-	0
Missing	19	8.5	21	9.4
Totals	224	100	224	99.9

Sources of information about programs

There was a wide diversity of reported sources from which celebrants received information about pre-marriage education programs (Table 5.3). The most common sources were through continuing education activities (including PREPARE/ENRICH training, seminars and information evenings) and through written information they had

obtained, such as pamphlets, mail advertising and government correspondence. Their churches and theological colleges were also important sources, as were other people passing on their knowledge of such educational programs by word of mouth. Some celebrants indicated that they had taken a more proactive stance and made personal enquires or even utilised the phone book!

Table 5.3
Sources of information about pre-marriage education programs*

Educational activities:		**Agencies/bodies:**	
Continuing education	38	Contact with organisations	17
PREPARE/ENRICH training	4	Centacare	9
Seminar/information evening	11	Family Life	3
		El Kanah	1
Written materials:		Marriage Guidance Council	1
Pamphlets / mail advertising	45	Marriage and Family	
Government correspondence	45	Foundation	1
Advertisement in newspaper /		Dubbo	1
magazine	3	Unifam	1
		Darwin marriage education	1
		Cairnmillar Institute	1
Churches/theological colleges:			
Catholic church	30	**Government departments:**	
Anglican church	35	Department of Family Services	1
Presbyterian church	2	Social Services Department	1
Uniting church	1		
Theological college	9		
Other sources:			
Other people / word of mouth	14		
Personal inquiry	15		
Phone book	2		
Local counselling groups	2		

* Respondents could give more than one response.

Organisations to which couples were referred

From these sources of information, the celebrants then made decisions about where to refer couples. Again, an array of organisations was cited (see Table 5.4). Some celebrants gave non-specific responses: for example, a denomination only (Anglican, Catholic, Uniting Church, Lutheran), or even more vaguely, "church/parish", "various religious organisations", "various non-religious organisations", the local community centre or the (un-named) program given in the pamphlet they received.

Others were more specific, naming the actual agency:

eg: Centacare, Family Life, Marriage Guidance Council, COPE, Family Planning Association,

or the body:

eg: St John's Marriage Preparation, Kinway-Albany, Family Relationships Institute, Wesley Central Mission, Cairnmillar Institute,

or the educational program:

eg: Engaged Encounter, Focus on Relationships, To Have and To Hold, Evenings for the Engaged, Preparing for the Marriage Adventure, Together as One.

Most religious celebrants (144) specifically named an organisation or program when encouraging couples to attend a program. One half (33) of the civil celebrants reported doing this. The other half of the civil marriage celebrants reported making a more general referral to programs, indicating that they hand out the brochures and then "leave it up to the couple to choose." Only eight religious marriage celebrants reported taking this approach.

Table 5.4
Organisations to which couples were referred*

Churches:			
Anglican	60		
Catholic	28		
Uniting church	5		
Lutheran church	1		
Methodist Church	1		
Church / parish	13		
Various religious organisations	5		
Agencies/groups:			
Centacare	29	Family Life	19
Marriage Guidance Council	17	Unifam	5
Kinway	4	Family Relationships Institute	5
Citizens Welfare service	2	Family Planning Association	2
St John's marriage preparation	1	COPE	2
Baptist community service	1	Marriage and Family Foundation	1
Cairnmillar Institute	1	Elm	1
Relationship development centre	1	Wesley Central Mission	1
Family Welfare	1	Presbyterian counselling service	1
Lifeline	1	El Kanah	1
Programs:			
Engaged Encounter	11	Focus on Relationships	5
Evenings for the Engaged	2	To have and to hold	1
Marriage Encounter	1	Preparing for the Marriage Adventure	1
Partners	1	Together as One	1
Marriage education program (unspecified)	10		
Other responses:			
'As per pamphlet'	33	A private counsellor	4
Local family counselling	4	Local community centre	3
Various non-religious organisations	1		

* Respondents could give more than one response.

Reasons for encouraging couples to attend programs

The question about celebrants' reasons for encouraging couples to attend these pre-marriage education programs drew the immediately obvious response, "to prepare for marriage" from 51 celebrants. However, the range of other more specific answers provides valuable data on celebrants' intentions and attitudes towards such educational programs (see Table 5.5).

Table 5.5
Reasons for encouraging couples to attend pre-marriage education programs*

Important purpose:		**Nature of the program:**	
To prepare for marriage	51	Content (unspecified)	29
To avoid possible problems	6	Religious component	38
Creates awareness of choices	5	Personal belief in their value	24
		Communication	11
Resources available:		Conflict resolution	8
Professional trained counsellors	16	Non-religious	2
Provide pamphlets	6		
Connection with the organisation:		**Access:**	
Recommended	28	Only one available	13
Reputation	12	Price	6
Personal involvement with the organisation	12		
External requirement:		**Assistance required:**	
Government requirement	12	Need help	27
Church policy	9	Inability to counsel couples myself	3
Other responses:			
Catholic church	1		

* Respondents could give more than one response.

Some believed in their value *per se*, either by virtue of their content, their emphasis on communication and conflict resolution skills, or their perceived capacity to create an awareness of choices and to help in the avoidance of problems. In this respect, a number also cited their "religious component" as a reason for their recommendation.

Some celebrants had a personal involvement with the organisation they referred couples to, or were basing their referral decisions on the recommendation of others or the program's or agency's reputation. While a few responded that they were able to conduct such programs themselves, there was also a candid recognition on the part of some celebrants that they themselves were in need of specialist assistance; such reasons included an acknowledged inability to counsel couples themselves, that professionally trained counsellors were available at these other organisations, and that either the

couples or themselves needed help. A few responses reflected the view that the encouragement of couples to attend pre-marriage education programs was not so much a matter of their own belief in them as a requirement of an external body - namely, "church policy" or "government requirement". Other less numerous reasons given were the relatively low cost of pre-marriage education programs, their provision of relevant materials and the "non-religious" nature of the particular organisation.

Information given to couples about the programs

As part of their encouragement to attend a pre-marriage education program, celebrants gave couples information about the programs they were recommending (see Table 5.6).

Table 5.6
Information provided to couples *

Written resources:		**Verbal information:**	
Relevant literature	123	Verbal description of course	61
Application form	4	Personal recommendation	57
Send them a letter	3	As much as possible - time, location, cost	31
Copy of letter from Minister	1	Advise them to contact course provider	1
Other information:			
Requirement of couple	5		
Confidentiality of courses	1		
Organisations are funded by Commonwealth	1		
None, very little	6		
Not specified	13		

* Respondents could give more than one response

Most gave either relevant literature, or a verbal description of or personal recommendation about the course. Many gave details about time, location and costs, while others sent letters or application forms. Six claimed they gave couples "no" or "very little" information.

Pre-marriage education provided by the celebrant

Forty six percent (n=140) of the celebrants who refer couples to pre-marriage education programs indicated that they personally provided some form of pre-marriage education in **addition** to their referral. These were largely religious celebrants - only 21 civil celebrants indicated they provided pre-marriage education to their couples. These civil

celebrants described their pre-marriage education as being limited to the provision of the compulsory pamphlets provided by the Federal Attorney-General's Department. It is also interesting to note that only one civil celebrant indicated that the FOCCUS inventory was used as part of the pre-marriage education they provided to couples.

Celebrants reported a wide range of activities and topics covered in these programs (Table 5.7).

Table 5.7
Topics and activities reported in the celebrants' descriptions of their own pre-marriage education programs *

Topics:		**Activities:**	
Religious perspective	61	Interviews / discussions	187
Communication / honesty	39	Pamphlets	45
Responsibilities in marriage	38	Questionnaires / worksheets	16
Expectations / needs	32	Recommend literature	10
The service	24	El Kanah Victoria video	1
Conflict resolution	21	Seminar	1
Finance	21	Individual program	1
Sexuality	17		
Family planning / children	16		
Relationships	15		
Family of origin	14		
Roles of husband / wife	9	**Inventory approaches:**	
Compatibility	7	PREPARE / ENRICH	66
Love	6	FOCCUS	13
Medical	6	Premarital counselling guide	2
Pitfalls in marriage	5	Pre-marital inventory	1
Seek help when needed	3	Genogram-based approach	1
Living in a step family	2	Psychometric testing	1
Happily ever after	2		
Family Law / divorce	2		
Loving for life	1		
An open door	1		
Pastoral / premarital guidance	1		
Biblical basis of marriage	1		
Place of marriage in current society	1		
An Evening for the Engaged	1		
Leave and Cleave	1		
Towards a life of loving	1		
Before we say forever	1		
Preparation for marriage	1		

* Respondents could give more than one response.

Summary

The analysis of the data given by the group of marriage celebrants in this research indicates that a number of different approaches are taken in encouraging or recommending couples to undertake pre-marriage education.

These data have shown that religious celebrants are more actively involved than civil celebrants in referring couples to pre-marriage education programs. Furthermore, religious celebrants are also more actively involved in the task of providing pre-marriage education for their bridal couples, regardless of whether these couples attend programs. One hundred and nineteen religious celebrants reported providing pre-marriage education as well as making a referral to a program. Only 21 civil celebrants reported doing likewise.

In this survey of referring celebrants the reported use of inventories such as PREPARE, ENRICH and FOCCUS was almost exclusively confined to the religious ministers. Seventy eight religious celebrants indicated they themselves used these instruments with couples to complement a referral to a pre-marriage education program.

The next chapter is concerned with the opinions of pre-marriage education held by those celebrants who do not encourage couples to attend programs.

Chapter 6

Non-referring celebrants

The group of 323 celebrants (59% of the total sample) who reported that they had not encouraged couples to attend pre-marriage education was comprised of approximately equal numbers of religious and civil marriage celebrants. Of the religious celebrants 49% (n=155) indicated that they did not encourage couples to attend programs. Seventy one percent (n=168) of all civil celebrants in this research sample did not encourage couples to attend pre-marriage education programs offered by other providers. A more detailed analysis of these two groups of celebrants revealed differences in their approaches to pre-marriage education.

Religious celebrants

While 155 religious celebrants in this group stated they had not in the past encouraged couples to attend pre-marriage education programs provided by an organisation or group external to themselves, they were very much involved in providing alternative learning pathways to marriage.

A number of respondents indicated that they did not refer couples to *another* agency/ body because they conducted their own marriage education programs. Eighty seven celebrants indicated they referred couples to courses conducted by themselves. Those who provided their own pre-marriage education described a variety of ways of working with couples; with the number of sessions spent with couples varying from two to six, and each being between one and three hours. Table 6.1 provides an insight into the types of topics which were covered in these sessions.

Table 6.1
Topics reported in the religious celebrants' descriptions of their pre-marriage education sessions provided to couples*

Christian / religious perspective	22	Responsibilities in marriage	5
Finance / budgeting	18	Relationships	4
Communication / honesty	17	Domestic violence	4
Sexuality / intimacy	16	Love	4
Conflict resolution	14	Decision making	4
Expectations / needs	13	Leisure and interests	4
Family planning / children	11	Commitment	3
Religion	11	Compatibility	3
Roles of husband / wife	10	Dealing with anger	3
Family of origin	10	Family Law Act	2
The service	9	Divorce	2
In-laws / family	9	Seeking help when needed	1
Parenting	7	Pre nuptial contracts	1
Biblical basis of marriage	6	Place of marriage in current society	1
Coping with change	5	Honeymoon	1
Plans for the future	5	Pitfalls in marriage	1

* Respondents could give more than one answer

Celebrants reported using a variety of activities to cover these topics including discussions and interviews, the use of worksheets and questionnaires, and recommending books for couples to read. Materials such as videos and books obtained from various organisations were also mentioned.

A further 57 described their course in terms of use of inventories such as PREPARE, ENRICH, FOCCUS or P.M.I. with couples. With these alternatives being provided by religious celebrants, there were only eleven religious celebrants who indicated that they did not either encourage couples to attend programs or provide sessions of their own.

Civil celebrants

Civil marriage celebrants who participated in the research showed a different approach to pre-marriage education for their bridal couples.

Of the 168 civil celebrants who reported not encouraging couples to attend programs, 115 (49% of all civil celebrants in the sample) indicated that they did not provide any form of pre-marriage education themselves. A number of reasons were offered for this, some of which are reflected in the following quotes:

I do not have the correct education to provide the service.

Never have been asked.

> *I do not consider that my appointment gives me the right to challenge people's decision to marry...*

One third (n=53) of the civil celebrants who did not encourage couples to attend pre-marriage education programs did say they provided some form of pre-marriage education themselves. Analysis of the descriptions of this provision revealed that for 30 of these celebrants this was limited to providing couples with the brochures in order to satisfy the provisions within the Marriage Act. Celebrants described their means of working with these brochures in a number of ways including "drawing attention" to them, "having them available", "distributing them" and "going through them with the couple". The following quote from one encapsulates the sentiment behind this "pamphlet approach":

> *Pamphlets as provided by Births, Deaths and Marriages given to couples ONLY. Feel it is not my place to advise. It is a personal decision for the couple.*

Twenty three celebrants described other forms of education that they provided for their couples. A variety of activities including talks, discussions and counselling "...when and if regarded as acceptable and necessary" was provided by this group. Most of the descriptions of these activities were given with caveats such as:

> *proffer advice to extremely young and obviously ill-matched couples or where there is some hesitancy, this is generally on economic or religious grounds*
> or
> *what I offer does not specifically include pre-marriage education.*

Several celebrants in this group also made use of specific resources such as books and mentioned the sharing of their experiences of married life with their couples. Another strategy mentioned in several cases was using the process of planning the wedding ceremony as a means of encouraging couples to talk about their relationship and their marriage:

> *I ask all my couples to WORK TOGETHER on putting the words of their ceremony together. When they come back they talk about their choice of words, and a few questions here and there get them thinking.*

One celebrant reported asking couples to attend a pre-marriage education program developed by himself. This course of action was solely due to the location of this celebrant in a remote area where access to any other programs was impossible. One other celebrant reported referring couples to ministers from other denominations to work through the PREPARE inventory with couples.

Non-referring celebrants' perspectives on pre-marriage education

Non-referring marriage celebrants were asked for their opinions of pre-marriage education programs (research objective 3), their attitudes to referring couples to programs (research objective 4) and their perspectives on potential barriers that might deter couples from attending programs (research objective 5). Data collected from the respondents as a whole group are presented in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2
Non-referring celebrants' opinions of pre-marriage education

	Strongly agree		Agree		Unsure		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Pre-marriage education programs help to prevent problems before they arise (d)	93	34.1	111	40.7	46	16.8	15	5.5	8	2.9
2. Pre-marriage education programs are for couples who have problems (a)	43	16.3	32	12.1	21	8.0	96	36.4	72	27.3
3. I would feel comfortable asking couples to attend a pre-marriage education program run by a church organisation (c)	79	28.7	71	25.8	26	9.5	53	19.3	46	16.7
4. I would feel comfortable asking couples to attend a pre-marriage education program run by a community/non-church organisation (k)	31	11.4	129	47.3	55	20.1	34	12.5	24	8.8
5. It is outside my role as a celebrant to encourage couples to attend pre-marriage education programs (b)	34	12.2	59	21.2	41	14.7	73	26.3	71	25.5
6. I believe the marriage celebrant is the best person to do some marriage education with the couple before they are married (h)	33	11.8	71	25.4	39	14.0	83	29.7	53	19.0

	Strongly agree		Agree		Unsure		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
7. I feel it would be imposing on a couple if I were to ask them to attend a program before they marry (f)	46	16.5	58	20.8	29	10.4	76	27.2	70	25.1
8. Couples who live together before marriage do not need to attend a pre-marriage education program (j)	13	4.7	31	11.3	30	10.9	103	37.5	98	35.6
9. I do not refer couples to pre-marriage education programs because there are no programs available in my area (i)	43	16.3	63	24.0	40	15.2	76	28.9	41	15.6
10. It is more important for couples marrying for a second time to attend a pre-marriage education program (e)	44	16.0	77	28.0	49	17.8	80	29.1	25	9.1
11. I think there isn't enough information available for couples and celebrants about pre-marriage education programs (g)	67	24.5	114	41.8	40	14.7	46	16.8	6	2.2
12. With all the other expenses associated with getting married, the couples have difficulty in affording the costs associated with attending a pre-marriage education program (l)	43	16.0	71	26.4	57	21.2	67	24.9	31	11.5

* The letters following the statements are those in the questionnaire

The figures reveal a strong belief that pre-marriage education programs help to prevent problems before they arise (item 1-75% agreement) and that they are not necessarily only for those couples who have problems (item 2-64% disagreement). They also indicate that a high proportion of celebrants would feel comfortable asking couples to attend a program conducted by either a church (item 3-55% agreement) or a community/ non-church organisation (item 4-59% agreement). Given these relatively favourable attitudes towards pre-marriage education programs, why they haven't encouraged or recommended couples to attend such programs is puzzling.

For just over half the celebrants, such a recommendation does not appear to lie outside their perceived role (item 5-52% agreement); half do not believe the marriage celebrant is necessarily the best person to conduct pre-marriage education with couples (item 6-49% disagreement) and just over one third believe that it would be imposing on couples (item 7-37% agreement). Again, most believed that couples co-habiting before marriage are just as in need of education as others (item 8-73%). Lack of pre-marriage education provision in their area is not seen to be a major issue by some celebrants (item 9-45% disagreement).

However, these data do reveal that almost half of the celebrants believed it more important for couples marrying for a second time to attend pre-marriage education programs (item 10-44% agreement), and that most considered there is a dearth of information available for couples and celebrants about pre-marriage education programs (item 11-66% agreement). There is also a reservation about the costs associated with attending pre-marriage education (item 12-42% agreement). These latter factors furnish general clues on perceived barriers to pre-marriage education programs.

The analysis so far, however, is undifferentiating between types of celebrants. Further breakdown of the data was undertaken to explore the differences between the civil and the religious celebrants. **Marked differences were found between the two types of marriage celebrants** (see Table 6.3 a, b, c and d). The means on all but three of the twelve statements were statistically different at the 0.01 level of significance. The means for the statements relating to the amount of information available and whether the celebrants would refer to a pre-marriage education program conducted by a community / non-church organisation were statistically different at the 0.05 level. There was no significant difference between civil and marriage celebrants with regard to not referring couples to programs because there were none in their area (see Appendix D).

The first important difference between the civil and religious celebrants lies in their attitude to the *types of pre-marriage education program* they would feel comfortable in recommending to couples (Table 6.3a).

Table 6.3a
Civil and religious celebrants' opinions of types of programs

	Strongly agree % Civil Religious	Agree % Civil Religious	Unsure % Civil Religious	Disagree % Civil Religious	Strongly disagree % Civil Religious
I would feel comfortable asking couples to attend a pre-marriage education program run by a church organisation (c)	7.6 57.3	22.2 30.8	12.7 5.1	32.3 1.7	25.3 5.1
I would feel comfortable asking couples to attend a pre-marriage education program run by a community/non-church organisation (k)	12.1 10.3	56.0 35.3	12.2 30.2	10.2 15.5	8.9 8.6

* The letters following the statements are those in the questionnaire

The celebrants differed in the degrees of comfort they would feel recommending couples to church and community/non-church based programs:

- 88% of religious celebrants agreed that they would feel comfortable asking couples to attend a pre-marriage education program run by a church organisation (cf: 30% of civil celebrants)

- 46% of religious celebrants agreed that they would feel comfortable asking couples to attend a pre-marriage education program run by a community/non-church organisation (cf: 68% of civil celebrants).

Moreover, their perceptions of the *purposes of pre-marriage education programs* differed significantly (Table 6.3b).

Table 6.3b
Civil and religious celebrants' perceptions of the purposes of programs

	Strongly agree % Civil Religious	Agree % Civil Religious	Unsure % Civil Religious	Disagree % Civil Religious	Strongly disagree % Civil Religious
Pre-marriage education programs are for couples who have problems (a)	16.9 15.4	16.9 5.5	11.0 3.6	40.3 30.9	14.9 44.5
Pre-marriage education programs help to prevent problems before they arise (d)	20.6 51.7	42.6 38.1	23.9 7.6	7.7 2.5	5.2 0

	Strongly agree % Civil Religious	**Agree** % Civil Religious	**Unsure** % Civil Religious	**Disagree** % Civil Religious	**Strongly disagree** % Civil Religious
It is more important for couples marrying for a second time to attend a pre-marriage education program (c)	10.1 23.9	22.8 35.0	20.3 14.5	36.1 19.7	10.8 6.8
Couples who live together before marriage do not need to attend a pre-marriage education program (j)	5.7 2.8	17.1 2.3	16.5 1.4	47.5 22.1	13.3 71.4

* The letters following the statements are those in the questionnaire

Their differences were evident in the following four items:

- 75% of religious celebrants disagreed that pre-marriage education programs are for couples who have problems (cf. 55% of civil celebrants)
- 90% of religious celebrants agreed that pre-marriage education programs help to prevent problems before they arise (cf. 63% of civil celebrants)
- 59% of religious celebrants agreed that it is more important for couples marrying a second time to attend a pre-marriage education program (cf. 33% of civil celebrants)
- only 5% of religious celebrants agreed that cohabiting couples do not need to attend a pre-marriage education program (cf. 23% of civil celebrants).

Thirdly, their perceptions of *factors affecting participation* were quite different (Table 6.3c).

Table 6.3c
Civil and religious celebrants' perceptions of factors affecting participation

	Strongly agree % Civil Religious	**Agree** % Civil Religious	**Unsure** % Civil Religious	**Disagree** % Civil Religious	**Strongly disagree** % Civil Religious
I think there isn't enough information available for couples and celebrants about pre-marriage education programs (g)	28.8 18.8	43.6 39.3	12.8 17.1	12.2 23.1	2.6 1.7
I do not refer couples to pre-marriage education programs because there are no programs available in my area (i)	16.4 16.2	27.0 19.8	15.1 15.3	30.9 26.1	10.5 22.5
With all the other expenses associated with getting married the couples have difficulty in affording the costs associated with attending a pre-marriage education program (l)	22.9 6.3	32.5 17.9	23.6 17.9	16.6 36.6	4.4 21.4

* The letters following the statements are those in the questionnaire

In particular, the cost of, and lack of information on, programs were perceived by the civil celebrants to be important blockages, perhaps a reflection of more of these celebrants residing in the smaller towns and cities.

- 58% of religious celebrants agreed that there isn't enough information available for couples and celebrants about pre-marriage education programs (cf. 72% of civil celebrants)

- 49% of religious celebrants disagreed that they do not refer couples to programs because of lack of programs in their area (cf. 41% of civil celebrants)

- 24% of religious celebrants agreed that couples have difficulty in affording the costs associated with attending a pre-marriage education program (cf. 55% of civil celebrants).

The most fundamental difference, however, lies in the *perception of their role* as a marriage celebrant (Table 6.2d).

Table 6.2d
Civil and religious celebrants' perceptions of their role

	Strongly agree % Civil	Religious	Agree % Civil	Religious	Unsure % Civil	Religious	Disagree % Civil	Religious	Strongly disagree % Civil	Religious
It is outside my role as a celebrant to encourage couples to attend pre-marriage education programs (b)	16.6	6.1	30.7	7.8	21.5	5.2	27.0	25.2	4.3	55.6
I feel it would be imposing on a couple if I were to ask them to attend a program before they marry (f)	27.8	0.8	31.5	6.0	15.4	3.4	21.6	35.0	3.7	54.7
I believe the marriage celebrant is the best person to do some marriage education with the couple before they are married (h)	4.3	22.4	15.3	39.6	11.6	17.2	38.6	17.2	30.1	3.4

* The letters following the statements are those in the questionnaire

The three items relating to role were answered by the two groups of celebrants as follows:

- only 14% of religious celebrants agreed that encouraging couples to attend pre-marriage education programs is outside their role (cf. 47% of civil celebrants)
- only 7% of religious celebrants agreed that asking couples to attend programs would be imposing on them (cf. 59% of civil celebrants)
- 62% of religious celebrants agreed that the marriage celebrant is the best person to conduct pre-marriage education with couples (cf. 20% of civil celebrants)

This issue of role difference is clearly a key factor underpinning their responses to all of the questions in this research. The roles of both types of marriage celebrant may have similar legal obligations, but they have very different histories and social expectations. Some idea of the effect of these factors on the perceived role of the civil celebrant can be gleaned from written comments made voluntarily by some respondents. Their elaborations are worth recording *verbatim* in order to capture the feelings lying behind their questionnaire responses.

Some emphatically pointed out that pre-marriage education was not part of their role.

> *From the outset of the Civil Marriage Celebrants program in the 1970s, pre-marriage education did not fall within the duties of such celebrants and it was never envisaged to do so, and this has been made abundantly*

clear on numerous occasions. If it was, then suitable training should have been made available to civil celebrants as it is to religious celebrants, where it forms part of their pastoral duties. The A-G's Department has made available lists of many organisations who offer such services, and these are brought to the attention of couples intending to marry. Whether they take advantage of such programs is their choice, and should be of no concern to the civil celebrant.

My role is as an authorised celebrant to conduct marriage ceremonies; present each couple with the obligatory pamphlets and then for the couple to personally decide if they wish to avail themselves or otherwise of marriage and counselling services offered. Whether or not they have or have not attended counselling sessions is none of my business or in fact within the scope of the terms of my appointment, nor would I presume to think I know better their needs or circumstances.

This questionnaire ... assumes I as a marriage celebrant believe I have some role as a marriage counsellor. The point I would like to make has been brought home to me by a number of couples upset by the attitude of other celebrants, mainly religious, who had advised them to consider counselling before marriage. In every case the couples felt that their integrity had been insulted.

Pre-marriage education programs are available to persons who are interested ... and civil celebrants should not be encouraged to undertake a counselling role simply because they are celebrants.

Others highlighted couples' expectations that civil celebrants should not become involved in pre-marriage education or recommend them to such programs.

Generally speaking, pre-marriage education is a "no-no" with civil marriage celebrants. We do whatever is expected of us, but by the time the couples reach us they doubtless would be insulted if we suggested pre-marriage counselling.

... I simply do not ask them [whether they have attended a pre-marriage education program] being, to my mind, an invasion of their privacy.

I certainly do not want to get into religious arguments re pre marriage ... I believe that couples come to civil marriage celebrants because they do not want contentious arguments.

I can say that pre-marital programs are not held in high esteem as they do hear of couples who break up, attending these programs and blame the programs. I would not encourage couples to attend any pre-marital programs ... because that would insult most and be hypocritical to me, as I believe their business is their private business. Most couples come to me because of the precise fact that they do not expect to have to do anything but plan their wedding.

Scepticism of the worth of pre-marriage education or the capacity of some celebrants to deliver it effectively, hinted at in several of the comments above, was overtly expressed in this celebrant's comment:

> *I do not believe that a lot of the so-called marriage counsellors are capable of sorting the "wheat from the chaff" ... I would doubt very much that a celibate priest or unmarried counsellor would have the "no how" [sic] to advise any person or persons on the pitfalls of marriage.*

While there were celebrants who clearly did not want to play any part in the pre-marriage education of couples and were critical of others' activities in this respect, there were a few expressing a more favourable attitude towards pre-marriage education and even regret that they could not play such a role:

> *The need for pre-marriage guidance is obvious but it should be done well before the celebrant's involvement in the couple's affairs.*

> *My suggestion about a pre-marriage education program was met with a disbelieving smile: they have both been married before, have had all that counselling, know what they want and are in a live-in situation. This is a fairly common reaction to such suggestions which is very frustrating as we are unable to enforce the undertaking of a pre-marriage education program, unlike churches who often wield a heavy hand on the matter, and virtually refuse a ceremony unless this has been carried out.*

This range of opinion on pre-marriage education is interesting in the light of what the official literature states about the role of the celebrant. The *Handbook for marriage celebrants* (1992), first published in 1963 and now in its fourth edition, contains a paragraph on the availability of marriage education and counselling (p.24) which refers to Section 42 (5A) of the Marriage Act 1961 and to Form 14A. In this section, the Marriage Act 1961 (p.25) states:

> *An authorized celebrant shall, as soon as practicable after receiving the notice [of intended marriage] referred to in subsection (1), give to the parties a document in the prescribed form outlining the obligations and consequences of marriage and indicating the availability of marriage education and counselling.*

Form 14A, the document mentioned in this paragraph is comprised of two pamphlets. One entitled "Happily ever...before and after" includes a section on "Before marriage marriage education", which refers to pre-marriage education programs in this manner (p.52):

- *Courses are practical, fun and do not push a particular moral or religious view*
- *Courses teach attitudes and skills which enrich family life and enhance successful marriage*
- *If you are remarrying, courses are available to explore the added dimension and complexity brought to a marriage by children from a former marriage.*

The second pamphlet contains a list of approved and funded agencies that conduct marriage education programs.

The celebrants, therefore, are provided with information about pre-marriage education which is positively presented and encouraging. In a letter to all civil celebrants in 1988, the Minister for Justice, Senator The Hon. Michael Tate, announced that "if marriage education is most effective where there is a voluntary recognition by couples that they can benefit from such programs, it is more appropriate to develop the public profile of marriage education and counselling in the community." To assist this, the pamphlet "Marriage and you" was being revised to reduce "its somewhat negative tone and to encourage referrals to marriage education programs". He exhorted the celebrants to play a more active role in referring couples to pre-marriage education programs:

> *I am requesting that all celebrants give consideration to taking a more active role in referring couples to marriage education courses as a form of preparation for marriage. I am not convinced that the best way to make a referral to such an organisation is to make your performance of the ceremony of marriage contingent on attendance at such courses... Nevertheless, encouragement to attend such courses short of compulsion is important if couples are to obtain information which will reduce the chance of their marriage breaking down at some future date* (Attorney-General's Department, letter 5/9/88: 2).

The letter also put forward a number of suggestions for equipping celebrants for this more proactive stance:

> *I encourage you to take the opportunity to meet with organisations conducting courses of marriage education in your district and arrange to see the work which is being done by these agencies. I understand that a number of agencies are planning programs designed specifically for the celebrant. Please make use of these.*
>
> *When referring clients to particular programs it is useful if you know the course leaders personally. In this way you make your referral more personal and increase the likelihood that your couple will be interested in attending the courses offered. I commend you for your valuable work and ask that you give serious consideration to the views I have put to you* (Attorney-General's Department, letter 5/9/88: 3).

In a follow-up letter in 1989, Senator Tate again urged civil celebrants to take this more active role and particularly emphasised the significance of their position in addressing values:

> *I am taking another opportunity to write to you to stress the importance the Commonwealth Government places on the institution of marriage and the protection of a strong family unit as the foundation of Australian society. As an authorised marriage celebrant, you have a valuable role in stressing these values when meeting couples and discussing wedding arrangements* (Attorney-General's Department, letter 16/3/89: 1).

It is against this backdrop that the role of the celebrant as gauged from the findings in this study is to be viewed. It is informative that, in this research, 47% of the civil and 14% of the religious celebrants believed that encouraging couples to attend pre-marriage education programs lay outside their role; furthermore, 59% and 7% respectively believed that asking couples to attend programs would be imposing on them. The celebrant quotations cited above mirror these empirical responses, and provide an idea of the feelings lying behind their questionnaire answers.

Summary

Those celebrants who said they had not encouraged or recommended couples to attend pre-marriage education programs in the past were asked questions about their perspectives on programs, referring couples and potential barriers to participation. Marked differences were in evidence between responses of civil and religious celebrants, these differences being statistically significant on nine of the 12 statements in the questionnaire.

Religious respondents would feel more comfortable referring to church programs, civil respondents more to community/non-church based programs. Their perceptions on the purposes of programs, and the degree to which lack of information and costs were barriers to participation, also differed.

What was fundamental, however, was their differing perceptions of their role as a celebrant. Only 14% of the religious respondents, for example, judged that encouraging couples to pre-marriage education programs lay outside their role (compared with 47% of civil respondents), again, only 7% of religious respondents considered asking couples to attend programs would be imposing on them (compared with 59% of civil respondents), and 62% of the religious respondents believed the celebrant was the best person to conduct pre-marriage education with the couple (compared with only 20% of civil respondents). While government encourages celebrants to be active in promoting pre-marriage education with couples, it is apparent from this research that many celebrants are not seeing this as a component of their role, primarily because of their perceptions of the social expectations of couples.

It is nevertheless noteworthy that high proportions of both samples believed that pre-marriage education programs had a preventative function: 90% of religious and 63% of civil celebrants agreed that programs helped prevent problems before they arose. Moreover, high proportions of both samples were also in agreement that cohabitation should not obviate the need for pre-marriage education programs: 94% of religious and 61% of civil celebrants disagreed that couples living together do not need programs.

Chapter 7

Programs preferred by celebrants

The data analysed in Chapter 6 identified a number of different beliefs held by religious and civil marriage celebrants with regard to pre-marriage education programs and their role in recommending couples to attend them. The question that follows from these data is: what are the circumstances under which these non-referring celebrants might consider encouraging couples to attend programs? This question (research objective 6) forms the basis of this chapter.

Non-referring celebrants were asked about the type of program they would like couples to attend *if they were to refer them to one*. Comparisons of civil and religious celebrants' responses on the three factors of type, location and cost are given in Tables 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3, and full details of the tests of significance are presented in Appendix D.

Table 7.1
Comparison of civil and religious celebrants' opinions on the *type* of program they would like their couples to attend

A program conducted by:	**Very unlikely** % Civil	Religious	**Unlikely** % Civil	Religious	**Likely** % Civil	Religious	**Very likely** % Civil	Religious	**Means** Civil	Religious
a community orgranisation	3.9		3.1		33.1		59.8		3.49	
	15.5		29.9		48.4		6.2		2.45	
a church organisation	34.1		18.7		30.1		16.5		2.29	
	0.8		3.0		13.0		83.2		3.79	
a tertiary institution	18.7		18.7		40.6		22.0		2.66	
(eg TAFE)	34.4		36.4		26.0		3.1		1.98	
psychologist/counsellor	28.7		21.3		25.5		24.5		2.45	
	16.8		33.7		39.6		9.9		2.42	
another organisation/	39.5		18.4		25.0		17.1		2.19	
person*	36.8		32.9		18.4		11.8		2.05	

* In the "another organisation/person" category, celebrants cited the following examples: celebrant (7), a married couple (3), a PREPARE administrator (3), joint community church (2), a medical practitioner (2), correspondence course (1), mobile counselling service (1) and service chaplaincy (1).

The religious celebrants not unexpectedly demonstrate a very strong preference for programs conducted by the churches, with 83% saying they would be "likely" or "very likely" to refer couples to such programs. The highly preferred option for the civil celebrants is for programs conducted by community organisations - 60% gave the "very likely" response - followed by a psychologist/counsellor (25% "very likely"). Just under half of the religious group would be unlikely to refer to community programs and just over half the civil group would be unlikely to refer to church programs.

Religious celebrants reveal a particular tendency to shy away from programs run by tertiary institutions (71% "unlikely/very unlikely", compared with an equivalent figure of 37% for the civil group). The differences between the civil and religious celebrants' opinions on the type of program they preferred were statistically significant in the case of community, church and tertiary institution (see Appendix D). There were no significant differences between civil and religious celebrants in their likelihood to refer to a psychologist / counsellor or to another organisation / person.

Table 7.2
Comparison of civil and religious celebrants' opinions on the *location* of a pre-marriage education program they would like their couples to attend

A program available in:	**Very unlikely** % Civil Religious	**Unlikely** % Civil Religious	**Likely** % Civil Religious	**Very likely** % Civil Religious	**Means** Civil Religious
the local area	3.5 3.2	0.7 1.6	24.5 18.5	71.3 76.6	3.64 3.68
nearest regional town	16.9 18.3	16.9 15.8	42.8 41.5	23.4 24.4	2.73 2.72
a capital city	42.0 41.0	29.0 25.6	18.8 23.1	10.1 10.2	1.97 2.02
another location*	57.6 53.2	23.7 32.2	15.2 9.7	3.4 4.8	1.64 1.66

*Other locations given were a weekend retreat (2) and a correspondence course (2).

High proportions of *both* celebrant groups claimed they would be "very likely" to refer couples to programs offered in the local area. To a much lesser extent, this was also true for programs in the nearest regional town. There were no significant differences between the religious and civil celebrants The conclusion from Table 7.2 is that program proximity would figure prominently in the minds of all celebrants when making decisions about referrals.

Table 7.3
Comparison of civil and religious celebrants' opinions on the *cost* of a pre-marriage education program they would like their couples to attend

A program where:	Very unlikely % Civil Religious	Unlikely % Civil Religious	Likely % Civil Religious	Very likely % Civil Religious	Means Civil Religious
no expense involved	2.7 3.6	1.3 9.9	19.5 17.1	76.5 69.4	3.70 3.52
fee <$50	10.0 3.7	12.2 8.2	45.5 33.9	32.2 54.1	3.00 3.38
fee < $100	42.5 20.2	32.9 21.2	14.5 33.3	11.8 25.2	1.97 2.64
fee > $100	71.2 53.3	20.5 26.1	5.5 14.1	2.7 6.5	1.40 1.74

High proportions of *both* types of celebrants stated they would be "very likely" to refer couples to programs where there was no cost involved (77% civil, 69% religious). The religious celebrants were still very likely to contemplate a program under $50 (54%), but with this expense, the proportion of civil celebrants dropped sharply (32%). The picture in Table 7.3 is that civil celebrants are much less likely than religious celebrants to consider referral when the programs involve expense, particularly a fee of more than $50. The differences between the two types of celebrants were not statistically significant when there was no cost, but were significant in the case of a fee less than $50 and $100 and where the cost was greater than $100 (see Appendix D).

Considering the issue of potential barriers to participation in pre-marriage education programs, it is interesting to reflect on those types of programs to which celebrants would be likely or unlikely to refer couples. These data clearly demonstrate that both types of celebrants would be more likely to refer to programs in their local area and where cost is minimal. It also indicates that the two types of celebrants would prefer different organisations conducting programs - religious celebrants favour church-run programs while civil celebrants favour those conducted by community organisations and, to a lesser extent, by psychologists/counsellors or tertiary institutions. The religious celebrants would be far more likely to refer to programs that bear a cost (up to $100) than their civil counterparts.

The nature of programs that celebrants would feel comfortable referring couples to attend was further investigated in terms of *content*. These celebrants were asked to indicate which topics in a given list they would expect to be included in a pre-marriage education program. Their responses are summarised in Table 7.4.

Table 7.4
Topics that celebrants would expect to be included in a pre-marriage education program

Topics	Number of responses
Communication skills	258
Expectations of marriage	256
Dealing with conflict	241
Decision-making	237
Roles of husband/wife	233
Coping with change	232
Sexuality	226
Budgeting	218
Dealing with anger	207
Coping with in-laws/family	207
Family planning	204
Different family backgrounds	196
Compatibility	188
Parenting skills	181
Religion in marriage	164
Domestic violence	161
Divorce	120
Family Law Act	78
Pre-nuptial contracts	65

In *Love, sex and waterskiing* (Harris *et al.* 1992), the two topics in pre-marriage education most highly valued by couples and most frequently appearing in program descriptions were "communication skills" and "conflict resolution skills". This study of celebrants' views strongly confirms the importance of these topics.

The breakdown of these responses by type of celebrant is presented in Table 7.5.

Table 7.5
Comparison of civil and religious celebrants' opinions on the *topics* they would expect to be included in a pre-marriage education program

	Civil celebrants %	Religious celebrants %
Budgeting	64.6	71.0
Communication skills	80.2	80.0
Compatibility	59.3	57.4
Coping with change	72.4	71.6
Coping with in-laws	59.9	66.4
Dealing with anger	64.1	64.5
Dealing with conflict	74.8	74.8
Decision making	80.2	72.9
Different family backgrounds	53.3	69.0
Divorce	39.5	34.8
Domestic violence	59.3	40.0
Expectations of marriage	80.8	78.1
Family Law Act	31.7	16.1
Family planning	61.7	65.2
Parenting skills	57.5	54.8
Pre-nuptial agreements	15.1	14.8
Religion in marriage	28.1	75.5
Roles of husband and wife	67.7	77.4
Sexuality	65.9	74.8

One notable aspect of this comparison is the degree of similarity in many of the responses of the two types of celebrant. Many topics were accorded approximately equal value by the civil and the religious celebrants. However, there were some exceptions. Not surprisingly, the greatest discrepancy was on the topic of "religion in marriage", recorded by 76% of the religious group but only 28% of the civil group. The other topics that were valued more highly by the religious celebrants were "different family backgrounds" (69% to 53%), "roles of husband and wife" (77% to 68%) and "sexuality" (75% to 66%).

In contrast, the civil group rated the following topics more highly than the religious group: "domestic violence" (59% to 40%); "Family Law Act" (32% to 16%); "divorce" (40% to 35%) and "decision making" (80% to 73%). The first three topics in particular are a noticeably different set of priorities for the civil celebrants.

Summary

Civil and religious celebrants' opinions on circumstances under which they might refer couples to programs differed in terms of the program provider, location and cost, and in most cases these differences were statistically significant. Interestingly, however, the *content* of programs that civil and religious respondents would expect to be in a program, if they were to refer couples, was similar: many topics were accorded approximately equal value, the major difference not surprisingly being "religion in marriage" (76% of religious and 28% of civil would expect this topic to be included). These findings on content confirm those from *Love, sex and waterskiing*.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 have examined the celebrants' perspectives on pre-marriage education. Civil and religious celebrants have expressed very different opinions on what they believe pre-marriage education to be and what it might have to offer their bridal couples. Importantly, civil and religious celebrants differ significantly on whether they should encourage couples to attend programs. Religious celebrants have shown themselves to be more active in encouraging couples to attend programs and in providing pre-marriage education to their couples. Conversely, civil celebrants are firm in their opinions that encouraging couples to attend pre-marriage education lies outside their role and that they are not qualified to provide programs.

It is celebrants like these, with their attitudes, values and preferences, whom couples encounter on their pathway to marriage. What couples bring to this meeting by way of their own ideas on participating in pre-marriage education is the essence of Part 4 of this book.

Part 4

The couples perspectives

Chapter 8

Participation in pre-marriage education programs

Participation in pre-marriage education programs was investigated in detail in the authors' earlier book, *Love, sex and waterskiing* (Harris *et al.* 1992). It was therefore not the intention to dwell to any great extent in this book on participants in programs. However, since this sample is a cross-section of those marrying in 1993, it is informative in this chapter to analyse those who participated as a check on the validity of the earlier data as well as to provide a more comprehensive backdrop to the examination of non-participants in the following chapters.

Couples were asked whether, prior to their marriage, they had *known* of the existence of pre-marriage education programs (for groups of couples) that people like them could attend. Almost three quarters (73%; 822) indicated that they had known about such programs. These respondents who knew of the existence of pre-marriage education programs were then asked whether they had *attended* any such programs prior to their marriage. Only 23% (n=193) had participated in them.

The proportion of the total sample (n=1127), therefore, who reported participating in pre-marriage education was **17%** (n=193). This figure substantiates the authors' view that participation likely exceeds the figure of 10-12% often quoted from anecdotal evidence. It approximates the estimate in our earlier papers of 20% participation (Harris and Simons 1993: 6; Simons and Harris 1994: 3).

This chapter focuses on the 193 respondents in the study who were **participants** in pre-marriage education programs. It analyses:

- the characteristics of those most likely to participate;
- the agencies/organisations that provided the programs;
- respondents' descriptions of pre-marriage education;
- who suggested that they participate in the programs; and
- respondents' judgements on how useful the programs have been for their marriage, and reasons for their responses.

Who is most likely to participate in pre-marriage education programs?

Participation in pre-marriage education was cross-tabulated with respondents' background data in order to obtain a profile of who is most likely to attend programs. The following tables present proportions of respondents for each specific age bracket, occupational group, educational level, religious category and pre-marriage living arrangement.

Younger couples were more likely to have attended than older. For example, 29% of those under 20 and 32% of those between 20 and 25 years of age participated in pre-marriage education, in contrast to 25% between 26 and 35 years and only 14% between 36 and 45 years (Table 8.1).

Table 8.1
Proportions in each age bracket participating in pre-marriage education programs

Age bracket (years)	Numbers and percentages of *participants* in each age group		Total *respondents* in each age group	
	n	%	n	%
under 20	2	28.6	7	100
20-25	86	31.6	272	100
26-35	85	24.9	342	100
36-45	17	14.0	121	100
46-55	2	2.9	68	100
56-65	1	5.9	17	100
over 65	0	-	4	100
Total	193	23.2	831	100

By occupation, those most likely to participate in pre-marriage education programs were in clerical (32%) and trade (31%) areas. On the other hand, those in managerial (15%) and semi-skilled/unskilled (16%) occupations were less likely to be participants, and those not in the paid workforce (5%) the least likely (Table 8.2).

Table 8.2
Proportions in each occupational group participating in pre-marriage education programs

Occupational group	Numbers and percentages of *participants* in each age group		Total *respondents* in in each age	
	n	%	n	%
Clerical	31	31.6	98	100
Trade	40	31.3	128	100
Sales & Personal Services	27	28.4	95	100
Professional	61	24.1	253	100
Semi/Unskilled	5	16.1	31	100
Managaerial	16	15.1	106	100
Other	6	15.4	39	100
Not in paid workforce	4	4.9	82	100
Student	8	26.7	30	100
Total	198*	23.0	862*	100

* Some respondents gave more than one answer.

There was a tendency for those with less education (trade 29%, year 12 25%, year 11 22%) to be more likely to have attended pre-marriage education programs than those more highly qualified (tertiary diploma 16%, postgraduate award 17%). The group with bachelors' degrees (30%), however, was a notable exception (Table 8.3).

Table 8.3
Proportions at each educational level participating in pre-marriage education programs

Highest level of education completed	Numbers and percentages of participants at each educational level		Total respondents at each educational level	
	n	%	n	%
Year 11 or less	37	21.6	171	100
Year 12	34	24.5	139	100
Trade/apprenticeship	26	29.2	89	100
Certificate from TAFE/ business college	19	18.6	102	100
Tertiary diploma	14	15.6	90	100
Bachelor's degree	50	29.8	168	100
Post-graduate diploma or higher degree	12	16.9	71	100
Total	192	23.1	830	100

Those who were Catholic were most likely to have participated in programs, with a relatively high proportion of 38% reporting attendance. This proportion is not unexpected given that church's relatively heavy commitment to providing pre-marriage education programs. Since couples wishing to be married in the Catholic church have traditionally been strongly recommended to participate in such programs, their large numbers have been an incentive for this church (and to an extent also in the Anglican church) to adopt a more centralised and coordinated approach to pre-marriage education provision (Harris *et al.* 1992: 16; also refer to the next section in this chapter). All of the other religious categories recorded between 18% and 25% participation rates (except Lutheran, where none of the 12 respondents attended). Not unexpectedly, by far the least likely to have participated was the group who reported no religious affiliation, of whom only 7% attended programs (Table 8.4).

Table 8.4
Proportions in each religious category participating in pre-marriage education programs

Religion	Numbers and percentages of *participants* in each religious category		Total *respondents* in each religious category	
	n	%	n	%
Catholic	88	38.1	231	100
Churches of Christ	3	25.0	12	100
Orthodox	5	23.8	21	100
Anglican	38	23.6	161	100
Baptist	6	23.1	26	100
Uniting Church	14	20.9	67	100
Presbyterian	4	18.2	22	100
Lutheran	0	-	12	100
Other	24	21.6	111	100
None	11	6.7	164	100
Total	193	23.3	827	100

While 27% (n=171) of those who had not been previously divorced attended programs, only 11% (n=22) of those previously divorced did so. Evidently many of those who had been married previously believed *pre-marriage* education programs, identifiably designated for those not yet married, would not be relevant for them.

Forty percent of those respondents who were living with their parents immediately before their marriage participated in pre-marriage education programs (Table 8.5). This contrasts quite markedly with a quarter of those who lived alone and 22% of those who lived with others. What is interesting, however, is that only 14% of those who reported living with their partner prior to marriage attended programs. Again, it would seem that many of those in *de facto* relationships considered that *pre-marriage* education programs were not for them.

Table 8.5
Proportions in each pre-marriage living arrangement participating in pre-marriage education programs

Living arrangements before marriage	Numbers and percentages of *participants* in each living arrangement		Total *respondents* in each living arrangement	
	n	%	n	%
With partner	63	14.4	438	100
With parents	86	40.0	215	100
Alone	26	25.0	104	100
With others	20	22.2	90	100
Total	195*	23.0	847*	100

* Some respondents gave more than one answer

It appears from this analysis of participant characteristics that those most likely to be found in pre-marriage education programs are in the younger age brackets (35 years or less), work in clerical or trade occupations, have trade or school-level education, or a bachelor's degree, are Catholic, are about to be married for the first time, and live with their parents immediately prior to marriage.

Which agencies/organisations provide pre-marriage education programs?

Respondents were asked which agency/organisation had provided the program they attended. Their answers are presented in Table 8.6.

Table 8.6
Agency/organisation that provided the pre-marriage education programs

Agency/organisation	Number of respondents who attended
Catholic Church (unspecified)	24
Centacare	37
Catholic Family Welfare Bureau	11
Engaged Encounter	4
Catholic Family Services	4
Natural Family Planning	3
Evenings for the Engaged	2
Ballarat Diocesan Family Services	2
Taree Catholic Church	1
Catholic Community Service, Sutherland, NSW	1
Total Catholic	89

Agency/organisation	Number of respondents who attended
Anglican Church (unspecified)	16
Anglican Counselling Service	6
AMECS	3
Anglican Marriage Education	2
Growing Together (Anglican)	2
Anglican Community Services	2
St John's Anglican Church	2
St. John's, Toorak	2
Holy Trinity Church, Adelaide	2
St Stephen's Anglican Church	1
Total Anglican	39
Uniting Church	6
Elm Centre	2
Uniting Church, Graceville	2
Total Uniting Church	10
Family Relationships Institute	5
Seventh Day Adventist Church	3
Baptist Church	2
Blacktown North Baptist Church	2
Assembly of God Church	2
Christian Outreach Centre	2
Sydney Vietnamese Community	2
El Kanah Christian Community	2
Jehovah's Witness	2
Presbyterian Church, Hurstville	2
Family Life Movement	2
School of Marriage	2
Combined Church organisations	2
Australian Pentacostal Church	1
Church/local church (unspecified)	16
"Religious" (unspecified)	1
No answer	8
Total	193

* Judging from their consecutive ID numbers, it can be assumed that the 8 no answers are the partners of the odd numbers listed in the table.

Not surprisingly, the Catholic (48%) and Anglican (21%) churches were the main providers of pre-marriage education for these couples, followed by the Uniting Church (5%) (These proportions assume the distribution as in the footnote to Table 8.6.) Three quarters of the program participants in this sample had attended programs offered by these three churches. These data confirm the mapping of the field two years ago as reported in *Love, sex and waterskiing* (1992: 38-40), which had found that these organisations were by far the most active in offering pre-marriage education programs in Australia.

While the great majority of organisations offering pre-marriage education programs in Australia are affiliated with churches, two of the agencies in this study are secular agencies - the Family Relationships Institute and the School of Marriage. These accounted for 4% of the participation. Another agency is the Sydney Vietnamese Community - a community organisation, though recognised to have a connection with the Catholic church.

How do participants describe pre-marriage education?

Participants described the programs they attended mainly in terms of content. As was found in *Love, sex and waterskiing*, the range of subject-matter was very diverse, though several topics were common to a great many programs - namely, communication, conflict management, sexuality, family of origin, finance/budgeting, roles and expectations. Sometimes, participants mentioned processes, and at other times, characteristics such as number of couples attending, location, length of sessions and inventories were given.

The responses of those who stated that they did not attend a group program but *did* attend sessions with their marriage celebrant are important to consider in any discussion of the meaning of pre-marriage education. Pre-marriage education is often construed in terms of group programs, particularly by government which funds many of them and by agencies which have more systematically organised such programs through sheer weight of numbers of people marrying. However, it is evident from the high proportion (73%) of respondents who claimed to know of the existence of pre-marriage education programs, and from the mix of answers relating to what types of programs they actually attended, that there is considerable diversity in interpretation among couples as to the meaning of pre-marriage education.

Of those who indicated in their questionnaire that they knew of pre-marriage education programs but did not participate in them, 69% (n=317) acknowledged that they had attended sessions with their celebrant before they married. There was a similar proportion (65%, n=177) among those who said that they did not know of pre-marriage education programs (and also of course did not participate). Most of these respondents attended only one or two sessions with their celebrant (refer to Table 8.7). It is clear that in a majority of these cases, the visits were more about wedding ceremony logistics - for example, the signing of documents, explanation of vows, times, format, certificates,

costs, venue, readings, words in the service and so on - than about any form of pre-marriage education. Assuming these single or double sessions were not about pre-marriage education *per se*, there were still 24 % who attended three or more sessions with their celebrant, some indicating up to 6 sessions, and two claiming 8, one 9 and one 12 sessions. Clearly, from the number of sessions and from their responses as to the topics covered, there is quite a considerable amount of pre-marriage education going on in pre-wedding sessions between couples and their celebrant.

Table 8.7
Summary of number of sessions attended with marriage celebrant

Number of sessions	Did not know and did not participate in program	Knew, but did not participate in program	Totals n	%
1	89	98	187	37.9
2	63	128	191	38.7
3	20	53	73	14.8
4	3	20	23	4.7
5	-	8	8	1.6
6	1	7	8	1.6
more than 6	1	3	4	0.8
Total	177	317	494	100

Topics covered in theses sessions included reasons for getting married, communication, commitment, sex, finances, religious backgrounds, family backgrounds and reactions to their marriage, children, roles and legalities, just to name some. Even the weather, the reception and what surname to use after marriage were mentioned! Typical comments on the content of these sessions were the following. (For these and subsequent quotations from respondents, the gender, age bracket and whether they had been previously married are referenced in parenthesis.)

> *Why we wanted to get married in the church, perceptions of the Christian faith, what marriage meant to each of us, the marriage service and what it means* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married);
>
> *Our perceptions of marriage, the Biblical view of marriage, commitment to personal growth, communication and conflict management, awareness of each other 's backgrounds* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married);
>
> *Money, sex, household tasks, roles, attitudes to issues, children, work, conflict resolution, religion* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married);
>
> *Different views expectations of marriage and what marriage means to us* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married);
>
> *Various areas relating to relationships such as things you think your partner likes dislikes, how you and your partner resolve arrangements and upsets, sexual and religious ideas, strengths in the relationship and ways to improve family relationships* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married).

Other sessions were described in more social and personal than educational terms, for example:

> *We are good friends with our Minister and most of our sessions were just general chats rather than dealing with specifics* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married).

Respondents who did not attend group programs were also asked whether they had completed a questionnaire such as PREPARE, or FOCCUS during sessions with their celebrants. Just over 18% indicated that they *had* done so. For the majority of these couples, this inventory and feedback on it was the main component of their pre-marriage education, taking up all or nearly all of the sessions they had scheduled with their celebrant. The common pattern was for the inventory to take up the only session, or one of two sessions, or two of three sessions. In one instance, the inventory encompassed six of eight sessions, the other two covering "money, budgeting, sex, children, responsibilities". In a few instances, it was merely one component among many other activities, as in one case where the inventory took up only one of twelve sessions (the others covering "communication, coping with in-laws, decision-making, family planning, religion, sex").

The very term "pre-marriage education", therefore, holds many meanings for couples. What is understood to be pre-marriage education differs markedly, from a chat betwixt couple and celebrant, to undertaking a PREPARE/FOCCUS questionnaire only, to participation in a full-scale adult learning group program. There are indeed many faces to pre-marriage education.

Who suggests that couples attend pre-marriage education programs?

The question of who suggested they attend a pre-marriage education program resulted in the information presented in Table 8.8.

Table 8.8
Source of suggestion to attend pre-marriage education

Source of suggestion	Number of responses	% of participant respondents (N=193)
Minister/priest	170	88
Civil celebrant	0	-
Friends	27	14
Parents	27	14
Other family	12	6
Myself	57	30
My partner	59	31
Other	5	3
Total	357*	-

* Respondents could give more than one answer

By far the most common response (and they could provide more than one) was that it was the minister/priest who had referred them. This response accounted for almost half the total number of answers. Eighty eight percent (n=170) of the participants gave this response, highlighting the prominent role of this person in the couples' learning pathway to marriage. The importance of the minister/priest had also been emphasised in *Love, sex and waterskiing* (1992: 82) where 86% of respondents had been referred to the program they attended by their minister. There were also other influences. Very similar proportions in both studies referred to self and partner decisions, and to friends and parents, confirming the important though more minor role played by these sources in encouraging participation in pre-marriage education.

What is the most significant finding here, however, is that not one respondent said that programs had been suggested by a civil celebrant. This is not to say that civil celebrants do not suggest or even encourage couples to participate - Chapter 5 indicates that some do provide such recommendation. Yet it appears from this sample of couples marrying in 1993 that very few, if any, couples actually end up taking the pathway to marriage through a pre-marriage education program as a result of civil celebrants' suggestions.

How useful are pre-marriage education programs as preparation for marriage?

Those who had attended programs were also asked the question, "Knowing what you know now about marriage, how useful do you think the pre-marriage education program has been for your marriage?". The usefulness ratings are given in Table 8.9.

Table 8.9
Extent of usefulness of pre-marriage education program

Extent of usefulness	n	%
Very useful	51	26.6
Useful	71	37.0
Somewhat useful	49	25.5
Not at all useful	21	10.9
Missing	1	-
Total	193	100

Almost two-thirds of the participants considered, from their vantage point of several months of marriage experience, that the program had been 'useful' or 'very useful'. Another quarter gave the more guarded response of 'somewhat useful', while one-tenth were not at all enamoured towards the experience in terms of its usefulness. This relatively high rating accorded to the usefulness of pre-marriage education programs mirrors the findings of many other studies, including *Love, sex and waterskiing*, and provides further research support for the efficacy of such programs as preventative agencies.

Two significant points deserve emphasis here in order to lend credence to this conclusion. Firstly, this sample is one obtained by Registrars of three States and is, on available measures, reasonably representative of the population marrying in Australia in 1993. Secondly, their reactions to the programs have been offered a considerable time after completion of those programs and after several months of marriage experience; *not*, as in many studies, recorded on so-called "happy sheets" (brief feedback forms completed immediately following programs) by couples still in the warm glow of engagement and without actual marriage experience. The responses of the participants in this study are therefore worthy of considerable attention.

In what ways are pre-marriage education programs perceived to be useful/not useful?

Positive comments

When asked to give reasons for their answer just over half of the participants' responses referred to gaining useful knowledge and skills. By far the most common cluster of responses was that the program had enabled them to face issues which they had either not considered before or were avoiding prior to marriage. Some typical comments were the following:

> *I think the time was well spent, because it made you speak on issues you may not address until it's too late.* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married);
>
> *It was good having discussed some matters before we got married. It made it easier when we were married to talk to each other. We can refer back to the exercises we did and the booklets we received. It is a source of help if we have any problems in our marriage.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married);
>
> *Because we confronted possible and unknown areas before marriage and then we were able to work together in all of the areas where a lack occurred and fix it before it got too large to fix.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married);
>
> *Made me more aware of issues that could arise (and have done). Made me a little more aware of my own reactions in various situations and those of my partner. A trained third party has the ability to bring out issues and to see situations differently to us - more understanding for us.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married), and
>
> *My partner and I had never discussed the above topics in great detail until the course. Now by doing so we are aware of each other's views, feelings and expectations of these very important topics which will always be a part of our lives.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married).

Apart from the discussion of issues, couples reported that the programs helped them more specifically to open up to their partner:

> *We talked about many things - realising what a serious thing marriage is. The intensity of the weekend made us open up to each other.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married);

to express feelings:

> *The course helps you express your feelings...* (male, 20 - 25, not previously married);

to reinforce in a positive way what they already knew:

> *The course confirmed and reassured us our decisions were what suited us and that communication is what it is all about.* (female, 26 - 35, divorced);
>
> *Reinforces well known ideas and brings your attention to them. Also it gets you to think about things which are simple but important for a relationship.* (male, 20 - 25, not previously married);
>
> *It prepared us for the differences in upbringing inherited from parents. Affirmed our commitment to one another because we knew where we stood with one another. We still have the reference material for later use.* (male, 20 - 25, not previously married);

to provide or highlight a Christian perspective on marriage:

> *Very useful to learn about and discuss marriage with a group of couples. Learning from a Christian perspective: invaluable.* (male, 20 - 25, not previously married);
>
> *It lets you know what sort of problems could occur in your marriage and how to solve them in a Christian way.* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married);

and to promote more realistic expectations:

> *Allowed me to have more realistic expectations of marriage and discover that some things needed working on.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married).

Another set of common responses was that the program helped participants learn more about their partner. Some respondents expressed it in this way:

> *Even though my husband and I had been together for 5 years before marriage we thought we knew everything about each other. But this program made us realise we didn't know everything at all.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married);

> *It helped me to appreciate where my partner was coming from, therefore making me more accepting of differences. Made me think about my own reactions.* (female, 36 - 45, not previously married);
>
> *Having both been married previously we were aware of the baggage we were carrying and deeply desired to be as free of it as possible before entering our marriage.* (female, 36 - 45, divorced).

From these two responses, it would seem that this learning about one's partner was particularly useful for some men:

> *It forces you to see situations in your partner's eyes and communicate easily. It helps males understand females better.* (male, 20 - 25, not previously married); and
>
> *It was useful for me because my husband looked at issues he hadn't considered before, eg: loss of identity when leaving work to have a family he looked at it from a female's point of view* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married).

Though many responses singled out the learning about their partner, participants also underlined the opportunity the programs provided to meet and talk with other couples in a similar phase of life transition:

> *It was good to meet other couples experiencing the same feelings we were about marriage.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married);
>
> *You got to share with other couples problems you may have so you would know how to solve them.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married); and
>
> *...and you can talk to other couples who are about to get married.* (male, 20 - 25, not previously married).

An insight into what specific help pre-marriage education courses can provide for members of particular communities can be seen in these three examples from the Vietnamese, Jewish and Jehovah's Witness communities:

> *It helps the couple have an actual thinking, know clearly their position in the new family, the rights and duties of the father and mother and lead their children in the right ways of nation, religion and its law.* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married);
>
> *It gave me a more detailed insight into the Ultra orthodox Jewish approach to marriage.* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married); and
>
> *It gave us the roles to be played by each of the couple without placing a major burden on either and most important it came from Bible based principles.* (male, 26 - 35, divorced).

One final point on the usefulness of pre-marriage education is worth highlighting. There is often debate over the long-term usefulness of a short-term intervention such as a pre-marriage education program. *Love, sex and waterskiing* provided some data on the extent to which benefits from a pre-marriage education program were still seen three months after the program. This issue was not the prime focus of this study; however, some of the participants unprompted comments indicated that some of the knowledge and skills learnt in pre-marriage education programs was retained and used after the wedding. For example,

> *We often refer to different things during heated times that we talked about eg communicate and stick to the point, remember that you've come from different homes and will take time to adjust.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married), and
>
> *As I am now faced with "real life" situations, parts of the course which was mostly commonsense are recalled.* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married).

In short, the role of pre-marriage education was that it "showed you marriage before stepping into it". One participant summed up in this way, illustrating the dilemma for researchers on the efficacy of pre-marriage education as a preventative measure:

> *It gave a good insite (sic) into the in's and out's of marriage. But only being married for 5 months I can't answer for long term. Try me again in 25 years.* (male, 20 - 25, not previously married)!

Negative comments

While this chapter is about participation in pre-marriage education, it is instructive in examining potential deterrents to participation (the focus of the next chapter) to analyse in some detail what those who attended found unhelpful. The most frequent comments drew attention to aspects of programs being common knowledge or common sense:

> *All fairly commonsense, just never discussed prior to course.* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married);
>
> *Being somewhat mature socially aware kind of couple, the course just reinforced what we already knew.* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married);
>
> *They didn't really tell us anything we didn't already know.* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married);
>
> *If I didn't know my wife well I would not be marrying her anyway.* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married);
>
> *The issues raised were supposed to challenge us yet every issue raised we had already discussed and know each other's feelings. I was disappointed as I felt we didn't gain anything in the weekend that we didn't already have.* (male, 20 - 25, not previously married);

> *It did cover some interesting topics but didn't really tell us anything we hadn't already discussed previously. When we found out that there was no attendance record, we skipped the second class and went to a swimming pool.* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married); and
>
> *After attending the program all we found out was what we knew about each other before we went there.* (male, 20 - 25, not previously married).

Some questioned their programs being church-based:

> *I think the give and take seems to work well. I don't think God has anything to do with it.* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married);
>
> *They should be organised through one government run body which does not bring religious biases into the course whatsoever.* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married); and
>
> *Course was offered by a Catholic organisation - I am not a Catholic.* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married).

Other participants believed the programs were pitched at couples in particular situations, either that they were more geared for younger couples:

> *Would have been excellent if we were both 20 years old getting married but as we are both in late 30's and mature we felt we learned little. Would still recommend it to friends. We wanted to made sure we covered every area of potential conflict in marriage.* (female, 36 - 45, not previously married), and
>
> *It was great to be able to share with other people in the same position, but I felt the course was more directed at younger couples in their early 20's - just starting out whereas my husband and I are in our late 30's / 40's with both an established career own home financial independence and very set in our own way.* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married),

or more suited to pre-engaged couples:

> *We attended a course in May - perhaps too close to actual wedding had hiccups occurred in our responses discusstions. It's probably more suited to those ''pre-engaged'' couples.* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married), and
>
> *By the time most attended they were committed to marriage eg engaged or getting married - no room to vet out unsuitable or immature people marrying for wrong reasons.* (male, 36 - 45, not previously married)

or designed for couples not living together:

> *Reason being is that we were living together 3 years before we married. I really believe the programs are designed for couples not living together before marriage.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married); and

> *As I was in a long term relationship (5 years) many of the problems discussed we had already faced.* (male, 20 - 25, not previously married)

For some participants, the basic problem was that the programs could not be sufficiently specific, given the range and diversity of people attending:

> *Because every relationship is different and I think counsellors cannot be specific enough on different couples' lives.* (female, under 20, not previously married);
>
> *Covered too broad a group and only basic information...* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married),
>
> *Course was very general. Tended to cover subjects that we had discussed between ourselves previously. No opportunity for direct counselling.* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married).

Further comments focused on other miscellaneous aspects which were not to some participants' liking, such as the perceived pressure to participate:

> *Partner not interested in attending - felt forced by the priest to attend. Partner participated in discussion minimally.* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married);

or the program's irrelevance at this stage in their lives:

> *Things we learnt were for years down the track when things aren't going well - right now we're going well, so irrelevant.* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married);

or the methodologies employed:

> *I felt like we were preached upon, almost like marriage counselling.* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married);

or simply that participants believed themselves already well prepared for married life:

> *I was prepared and knew what marriage was all about.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married),
>
> *We had been living together for the past 3 years and felt if we weren't ready for marriage by then we never would be.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married).

A few participants offered positive suggestions on what they thought should be provided in the way of marriage education. Three comments in particular offered advice to program developers in relation to course length, intensity, nature, professionalism, timing and group size:

> *Our marriage course should have been more intense and perhaps should have been longer eg a 3 month evening course which should be compulsory. They should be organised through one government run body which does*

> *not bring religious biases into the course whatsoever. Perhaps couples could receive or made available to private counselling if needed. These courses must be taken more seriously and handled in a more professional manner.* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married);
>
> *I think a refresher course for newly-weds course may also be of value.* (female, 26 - 36, not previously married);
>
> *... probably more benefit if smaller groups, 2 or 3 groups, not 10 - 15 as were at our session. Needs to look at whether couples are suitable mature able to cope deal with such a huge change to someone's life, even to looking to when you have children.* (female, 26 - 36, not previously married).

The above responses given by those who, for one reason or another, had attended a pre-marriage education program furnish important information on what it is about pre-marriage education that makes it appear unattractive to couples. For one thing, this information has validity in that has been recorded by people who have actually gone to programs, experienced what they have to offer and have judged them to have been less than helpful. Moreover, these people, although somewhat disaffected by that experience several months earlier, have agreed voluntarily to participate in this research, to receive a mail questionnaire and to respond to the open-ended question on why they found the experience unhelpful. It is indeed significant that as many as 71% (15 of the 21 in Table 8.9) of those who gave the answer "not at all useful" supplemented their quantitative response of a tick with a written reflection on the reason for their response.

The reasons given by *participants* for not finding their pre-marriage education programs useful provide an excellent springboard now for exploring the issue of *non-participation* in the next chapter.

Summary

This chapter has analysed the 193 people who participated in pre-marriage education programs and their experiences of the programs. To a large extent, the findings confirm those of the authors' earlier national study, *Love, sex and waterskiing* (1992). However, as this is a study of a cross-section of people marrying in Australia in 1993 and the earlier work had been focused solely on participants already in pre-marriage education programs, the findings have a degree of generalisability that the earlier work did not enjoy. It is also the case that further interesting details have been unearthed. New agencies/organisations not recorded in the earlier work have surfaced to supplement our knowledge and to add more jigsaw pieces to the total picture of pre-marriage education in this country. The picture on who is most likely to participate can be now more sharply defined as a result of this sample. A more detailed map of the many learning pathways to marriage and what they entail has been drawn.

The main findings of this chapter may be summarised as follows:

1 The existence of pre-marriage education programs is relatively well known among those marrying in Australia. Almost three quarters (73%, 822) of the total sample of 1,127 people in this study indicated that they had known about such programs.

2 However, of those who knew about programs, less than a quarter (23%, 193) made the decision to participate in them. Generalising across the total population, this proportion suggests that only 17% of those marrying in Australia attend pre-marriage education programs.

3 The very term "pre-marriage education" holds many meanings even among those who participate in programs. What is understood to be pre-marriage education differs markedly, from a chat between couple and celebrant, to undertaking a PREPARE/FOCCUS questionnaire only, to participation in a full-scale adult learning group program. There are many faces to pre-marriage education.

4 Based on the data obtained in this study:

- those most likely to participate in pre-marriage education programs are younger (35 years or less); work in clerical or trade occupations; have trade or school-level education, or a bachelor's degree; be Catholic; be a first marriage; and live with parents immediately prior to marriage.
- participants are most likely to attend a program provided by the Catholic or Anglican churches.
- participants are most likely to have been encouraged to attend by their minister/priest. Remarkably, even though a number of civil marriage celebrants report referring couples to pre-marriage education programs, not one respondent attended a program as a result of a suggestion from a civil celebrant.
- almost two-thirds consider their program "useful" or "very useful". The most common ways were in gaining useful knowledge and skills for their marriage, in learning more about their partner and meeting with other couples in a similar stage of life transition. What they found unhelpful centred mainly on the nature of the programs themselves (for example, common sense, church-based, designed for couples in particular circumstances, the methodologies), the perceived pressure to participate and their belief that they were already well prepared for married life.

Chapter 9

Non-Participation in pre-marriage education programs

Love, sex and waterskiing (1992) had revealed a number of benefits from pre-marriage education as seen through the eyes of program participants, and thereby confirmed the findings of several other studies (D'Augelli *et al.* 1974; Witkin 1976; Farris and Avery 1980; Bader *et al.* 1980, 1981; Markman *et al.* 1988). If pre-marriage education programs do indeed have potential as preventative measures, then the intriguing question that was a prime motivator for undertaking this research is why more couples don't avail themselves of this opportunity - what are the factors that act as deterrents or barriers to couples attending programs? This question forms the focus of this chapter.

In this study, almost three quarters (73%, n=822) of the respondents reported that, prior to their marriage, they had *known* of the existence of pre-marriage education programs that people like them could attend. However, just over three quarters (77%; 640) of this group replied that they had *not participated* in them. When the number who claimed they did not even know of the existence of programs is added, the proportion in the total sample of 1,127 respondents who had not participated in programs was 83% (n=944).

The chapter focuses on those respondents in the study who did *not* participate in pre-marriage education programs. It analyses:

- the characteristics of those most likely not to participate;
- their perceptions of the importance of various reasons for not participating; and
- their judgements on how useful it may have been for them to have participated, knowing now what they know about marriage.

Who is least likely to participate in pre-marriage education programs?

The focus of *Love, sex and waterskiing* was on participants attending pre-marriage education programs. As the sample in this study was a cross-section of people marrying in 1993, there was the opportunity not only to investigate participants but also non-participants. Non-participation in pre-marriage education programs was cross-tabulated with respondents' background data in order to derive a picture of who is most likely not to attend such programs. As in the analysis of the participants (refer to Chapter 8), proportions of non-participants are presented in the following tables, classified according to age bracket, occupational group, educational level, religious category and pre-wedding living arrangement. The characteristics of the non-participants are a mirror image of those of the participants, and so will be only cursorily described here.

As age increases, so does the likelihood of non-participation also increase. The pattern is very clear, as revealed in Table 9.1.

Table 9.1
Proportions in each age bracket not participating in pre-marriage education programs

Age brackets (years)	Numbers and percentages of *non-participants* in each age group		Total *respondents* in each age group	
	n	%	n	%
under 20	5	71.4	7	100
20-25	186	68.4	272	100
26-35	257	75.1	342	100
36-45	104	86.0	121	100
46-55	66	97.1	68	100
56-65	16	94.1	17	100
over 65	4	100.0	4	100
Total	638	76.8	831	100

Those most likely not to participate were the respondents not in paid work (Table 9.2). Within the workforce, those most likely to be non-participants were in the managerial (85%) and semi-skilled/unskilled (84%) groups.

Table 9.2
Proportions in each occupational group not participating in pre-marriage education programs

Occupational group	Numbers and percentages of *non-participants* in each occupational group		Total *respondents* in each occupational group	
	n	%	n	%
Clerical	67	68.4	98	100
Trade	88	68.8	128	100
Sales & Personal Services	68	71.6	95	100
Professional	192	75.9	253	100
Semi/Unskilled	26	83.9	31	100
Managerial	90	84.9	106	100
Other	33	84.6	39	100
Not in paid workforce	78	95.1	82	100
Student	22	73.3	30	100
Total	664*	77.0	862*	100

* Some respondents gave more than one answer.

By education, those with tertiary qualifications (except for bachelor's degrees) were the most likely not to be participants.

Table 9.3:
Proportions at each educational level not participating in pre-marriage education programs

Highest level of education completed	Numbers and percentages of *non-participants* at each educational level		Total *respondents* at each educational level	
	n	%	n	%
Year 11 or less	134	78.4	171	100
Year 12	105	75.5	139	100
Trade/apprenticeship	63	70.8	89	100
Certificate from TAFE/ business college	83	81.4	102	100
Tertiary diploma	76	84.4	90	100
Bachelor's degree	118	70.2	168	100
Post-graduate diploma or higher degree	59	83.1	71	100
Total	638	76.9	830	100

Respondents declaring no religion (93%) or a Lutheran background (100%) were the most likely to be non-participants, followed by the Presbyterians (82%) (Table 9.4)

Table 9.4
Proportions in each religious category not participating in pre-marriage education programs

Religion	Numbers and percentages of *non-participants* in each religious category		Total *respondents* in each religious category	
	n	%	n	%
Catholic	143	61.9	231	100
Churches of Christ	9	75.0	12	100
Orthodox	16	76.2	21	100
Anglican	123	76.4	161	100
Baptist	20	76.9	26	100
Uniting Church	53	79.1	67	100
Presbyterian	18	81.8	22	100
Lutheran	12	100.0	12	100
Other	87	78.4	111	100
None	153	93.3	164	100
Total	634	76.7	827	100

Those who had been previously divorced (89%, n=183) were considerably more likely to be non-participants than those who had not been divorced (73%, n=457). Similarly, those who had been living in a *de facto* relationship immediately prior to marriage (86%) were more likely not to attend pre-marriage education programs than those living with others (78%), alone (75%) or with parents (60%).

Table 9.5
Proportions in each pre-marriage living arrangement not participating in pre-marriage education programs

Living arrangements immediately before marriage	Numbers and percentages of *non-participants* in each living arrangement		Total *respondents* in each living arrangement	
	n	%	n	%
With partner	375	85.6	438	100
With parents	129	60.0	215	100
Alone	78	75.0	104	100
With others	70	77.8	90	100
Total	652*	77.0	847*	100

* Some respondents gave more than one answer

This analysis of the characteristics of non-participants shows that those most likely not to attend pre-marriage education programs are older, not in paid employment or work in managerial or semi-skilled/unskilled occupations, have tertiary education other than a bachelor's degree, be of no religion or in the Lutheran or Presbyterian churches, be divorced, and live in a *de facto* relationship prior to their marriage.

Why don't couples participate in pre-marriage education programs?

There are potentially many reasons why couples do not attend pre-marriage education programs. In order to understand more about the nature of these barriers and their relative strengths, couples in this study were asked to rate the importance of 32 given factors in their decision not to participate in such programs. The 5-point rating scale, with the weightings in brackets, was as follows: "not important/not applicable" (1), "slightly important" (2), "somewhat important" (3), "quite important" (4) and "very important" (5).

Table 9.6 presents, for each factor in their decision not to attend a program, the ratings of importance, the mean importance based on these ratings and the ranking in relation to the other factors. The reasons have been listed in their order of ranking.

Table 9.6 Importance of reasons for not attending pre-marriage education programs

Reason	Not important n	%	Slightly important n	%	Somewhat important n	%	Quite important n	%	Very important n	%	Missing data N=640	Mean important	Ranking
Because I didn't think I needed to go to a course about marriage	192	37.2	46	8.9	66	12.8	67	13.0	145	28.1	124	2.86	1
Because I believe it is best for us as a couple to sort out our own problems	218	42.1	50	9.7	55	10.6	72	13.9	123	23.7	122	2.68	2
Because my partner and I had lived together before we married	250	48.3	24	4.6	54	10.4	63	12.2	127	24.5	122	2.60	3
Because we did not have any problems in our relationship	234	45.1	51	9.8	64	12.3	66	12.7	104	20.0	121	2.53	4
Because I'm not interested in attending programs	305	58.9	56	10.8	48	9.3	34	6.6	75	14.5	122	2.07	5
Because I did not want to discuss personal issues with other people	297	57.2	65	12.5	58	11.2	40	7.7	59	11.4	121	2.03	6
Because I didn't think the program would meet my needs	316	60.9	42	8.1	61	11.8	48	9.2	52	10.0	121	1.99	7
Because I don't enjoy going to programs	325	62.6	61	11.8	63	12.1	32	6.2	38	7.3	121	1.84	8
Because I had too many things to do	335	64.7	53	10.2	50	9.7	46	8.9	34	6.6	122	1.82	9 (equal)
Because I thought the program would have a lot of religion in it	344	66.4	49	9.5	49	9.5	28	5.4	48	9.3	122	1.82	9(equal)
Because my partner did not want to go	425	81.9	15	2.9	29	5.6	23	4.4	27	5.2	121	1.48	18
Because the programs available did not seem useful	336	64.7	53	10.2	61	11.8	36	6.9	33	6.4	121	1.80	11

Table 9.6
Importance of reasons for not attending pre-marriage education programs

Reason	Not important n	%	Slightly important n	%	Somewhat important n	%	Quite important n	%	Very important n	%	Missing data N=640	Mean important	Ranking
Because I didn't think I could attend regularly	352	68.0	41	7.9	55	10.6	35	6.8	35	6.8	122	1.76	12
Because of the time required to finish the program	370	71.4	50	9.7	42	8.1	23	4.4	33	6.4	122	1.65	13
Because the programs available did not seem interesting	391	75.3	32	6.2	48	9.2	28	5.4	20	3.9	121	1.56	14
Because I wasn't willing to give up my leisure time	387	74.7	47	9.1	39	7.5	31	6.0	14	2.7	122	1.53	15
Because our minister/priest did not encourage us to attend	416	80.3	23	4.4	32	6.2	17	3.3	30	5.8	122	1.50	16(equal)
Because I have been married before	420	81.2	16	3.1	34	6.6	16	3.1	31	6.0	123	1.50	16(equal)
Because we could not afford the fees for the program	424	81.9	24	4.6	23	4.4	19	3.7	28	5.4	122	1.4	19(equal)
Because the program was offered at an inconvenient time	410	79.3	42	8.1	23	4.4	16	3.1	26	5.0	123	1.46	19(equal)
Because attending programs would take away time I would spend with my family	412	79.5	40	7.7	29	5.6	18	3.5	19	3.7	122	1.44	21
Because the program was at an inconvenient location	419	80.9	32	6.2	35	6.8	15	2.9	17	3.3	122	1.42	22(equal)
Because my partner had been married before	438	84.7	12	2.3	26	5.0	9	1.7	32	6.2	123	1.42	22(equal)

Table 9.6 Importance of reasons for not attending pre-marriage education programs

Reason	Not important		Slightly important		Somewhat important		Quite important		Very important		Missing data N=640	Mean important	Ranking
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%			
Because the programs were of poor quality	432	83.4	24	4.6	30	5.8	19	3.7	13	2.5	122	1.37	24
Because I wanted to learn something specific and the program seemed too general	446	85.9	33	6.4	21	4.0	9	1.7	10	1.9	121	1.27	25
Because I thought the program would raise sensitive issues that we had not dealt with	455	87.8	27	5.2	16	3.1	13	2.5	7	1.4	122	1.24	26
Because my family did not encourage us to attend	456	88.0	26	5.0	22	4.2	6	1.2	8	1.5	122	1.23	27
Because our friends did not encourage us to attend	463	89.2	26	5.0	18	3.5	9	1.7	3	0.6	121	1.19	28
Because of transport problems	484	93.6	8	1.5	8	1.5	6	1.2	11	2.1	123	1.17	29(equal)
Because we could not get financial assistance to attend the program	473	91.5	21	4.1	12	2.3	3	0.6	8	1.5	123	1.17	29(equal)
Because we had trouble arranging child care	479	92.8	10	1.9	11	2.1	7	1.4	9	1.7	124	1.17	29(equal)
Because I was not confident of my learning ability	488	94.0	11	2.1	8	1.5	7	1.3	5	1.0	121	1.13	32

What is clearly noticeable is that the most important factors are intrinsic rather than extrinsic, concerned with private beliefs as distinct from barriers external to themselves. The first six rankings - the only ones above a mean of 2.0 - are *intrinsic* factors, what Cross (1981) labels "dispositional barriers" as distinct from "situational" or "institutional barriers". These centred on the couples' beliefs that:

- there was no reason to attend:
  "I didn't think we needed to go to a course about marriage" (ranked 1)
  "My partner and I had lived together before we got married" (ranked 3)
  "We did not have any problems in our relationship" (ranked 4)

- their relationship was a private matter:
  "I believe it is best for us as a couple to sort out our own problems" (ranked 2)
  "I did not want to discuss personal issues with other people" (ranked 6)

- they would not be interested in such programs:
  "I'm not interested in attending programs" (ranked 5).

This is also evident from examination of the proportions of respondents who considered particular reasons to be "quite" or "very" important. Four reasons clearly stand out as very significant in the eyes of non-participants:

"I believe it is best for us as a couple to sort out our own problems" (ranked 2)
47.6%

"I didn't think we needed to go to a course about marriage" (ranked 1)
42.1%

"My partner and I had lived together before we got married" (ranked 3)
36.7%

"We did not have any problems in our relationship" (ranked 4)
32.7%

On the other hand, *external* (or situational) barriers were noticeably ranked near the end of the list. There were issues concerned with child care, finance and transport:

"We had trouble arranging child care" (ranked =29)

"We could not get financial assistance to attend the program" (ranked =29)

"Transportation problems" (ranked =29),

as well as statements relating to significant others:

"Our friends did not encourage us to attend" (ranked 28)

"My family did not encourage us to attend" (ranked 27)

"My partner did not want to go" (ranked 18)

"Our priest/minister did not encourage us to go" (ranked =16).

The other statements near the bottom of the list related to the programs themselves, such as they would be too intrusive (ranked 26), too general (ranked =24), of poor quality (ranked =24), inconveniently located (ranked =22), time-consuming (ranked 21), costly (ranked =19) or on at an inconvenient time (ranked =19). Altogether, these three categories of responses accounted for 14 of the 17 least important reasons. (Two of the other low ranked responses related to either the respondent or the partner having been married before, and the lowest was an intrinsic factor on confidence in their own learning ability.)

A glance at the proportions giving the "not important" response again reinforces the clear finding that the three reasons of child care, finance and transport were of little significance or relevance (these being three of the four ratings over 90% in the "not important" category):

"Transportation problems" (ranked =29) 93.6%

"We had trouble arranging child care" (ranked =29) 92.8%

"We could not get financial assistance to attend the program" (ranked =29) 91.5%

This differentiation is most marked. It highlights the attitudinal (dispositional) nature of the barriers to pre-marriage education programs as distinct from factors external to the individual. It also underlines the point that minimising external (situational) barriers will not necessarily increase participation to any great degree unless there is an accompanying focus on marketing the *value* of attendance at such programs.

The belief that pre-marriage education programs are not useful (mean 1.80, ranked 11) is of interest in the light of the data presented in Chapter 8 on participants' judgements of the usefulness of programs. Sixty four percent of those in this study who did attend programs considered them to have been "useful" or "very useful", and only 11% claimed they were not useful. Similarly, the factor relating to the priest/minister not encouraging them to attend (mean 1.50, ranked equal 16) is noteworthy considering the data in Chapters 5 and 6 on referring and non-referring celebrants.

A key point in Table 9.6 is that individual item means were low - all but six items ranged between "not important/not applicable" and "slightly important". Evidently, no single item stands out as being important as a barrier to participation. As in other research studies by Scanlan and Darkenwald (1984) and Boshier (1971), where individual means were also generally low, the deterrent construct is both multi dimensional and more complex than suggested by other intuitive conceptualisations, such as those by Cross (1981) and Darkenwald and Merriam (1982). To explore this multidimensionality further, a factor analysis was carried out on the various factors listed as barriers to participation (see Appendix E).

There were five main factors relating to non-participation in pre-marriage education - lack of interest, time constraints, lack of family encouragement, lack of course relevance and previously married. Darkenwald and Valentine (1985), in their study of deterrents to participation among the general American adult public, found six factors of importance, three of which correspond to factors found in this study: low personal

priority, time constraints and lack of course relevance. Another of the items in this marriage study, "lack of family encouragement", was included in the American study under "lack of confidence", interpreted as an indirect source of self-doubt and diffidence reinforced or mediated by the influence of significant others. Their other three were lack of confidence, cost and personal problems. Those authors (1985: 185) concluded "that modified or specially developed DPS [deterrents to participation scale] instruments are needed to measure deterrents for distinctive sub-populations". This marriage study's fifth factor was, in fact, comprised of items specially added to the American scale to adapt it for engaged couples.

These findings suggest that the decision not to participate in organised pre-marriage education programs is typically the result of the combined or synergistic effects of multiple deterrents, rather than just one or two in isolation. They also indicate that many of the important items relate to the individual and are, in fact, matters over which the individual has a degree of influence - namely, perceptions that programs are of no interest or relevance, that family do not encourage attendance and that previous marriage and divorce means that attendance is unnecessary. Only the factor of time constraints really relates to the world external to the individual. This finding lends further evidence to the general conclusion arrived at earlier in this chapter that the barriers to participation in pre-marriage education are predominantly *intrinsic*.

What additional reasons do couples have for not participating in programs?

As well as asking respondents in a fixed choice format to rate the importance of given reasons for non-participation, an open-ended approach was taken. They were invited to explain in their own words additional reasons why they did not attend. A great number of respondents took this opportunity.

Quantitative data from their ratings of the importance of various reasons in their decision not to attend can inform our understanding of deterrents to a certain depth. Analysis of their open-ended comments, however, provides a far deeper insight into what it is that stopped them from participating. And from these responses can be inferred strategies which might contribute to higher participation if this is seen as a desired means (but by no means the only one) towards reducing the divorce rate.

Analysis of qualitative responses volunteered by the non-participants confirms these reasons and indicates what *meaning* these statements have for these couples. That these responses were often very frank and were offered voluntarily testifies to their validity, even though they may be construed as excuses *ex post facto*. In particular, they help to unravel and tease out what these intrinsic reasons really imply. What, then, were these attitudes and beliefs that served as barriers for couples?

(1) Belief that they didn't need pre-marriage education

Couples who had been married before or who were in a *de facto* relationship prior to marriage were numerous among this category of non-participants. The last comment is

interesting in that it refers back to both partners' parental marriages and reveals the belief that the perceived absence of difficulty one generation back implies no need for their own marriage preparation.

> *It was not part of the thought process getting married for the second time.* (female, 36 - 45, divorced)
>
> *I think they are a waste of time for the majority of couples who have known each other for a reasonable period of time* (male, 26 - 35, divorced)
>
> *We have been living together for 10 years before getting married and I honestly didn't think of it at all. By now we would need marriage guidance, not pre-marriage education.* (female, 26 - 35, not previously *married)*
>
> *Because we had been together for 7 years before we married, lived together on and off, been through an awful lot together and felt we were quite able to work out any problems we may have in the future.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)
>
> *Having lived for 6 years with my partner in a de facto situation I felt that I'd already seen the pros and cons of marriage.* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *Having been in the relationship for 10 years prior to marriage and living together, education programs seemed somewhat redundant.* (male, 36 - 45, not previously married)
>
> *There were no foreseeable problems. Lived together for 2 years so should know each other. Both parents and in laws are still happily married and we have similar backgrounds so no major conflicts.* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)

These responses indicate a need for different types of pre-marriage education programs as the pathway to marriage for *de facto*, previously married and older couples compared with those on offer for younger couples becoming married for the first time and not already living together. This need was expressed more explicitly by other respondents:

> *One was available at my church but I felt uncomfortable in that I was in a de facto relationship before marriage.* (male, 36 - 45, not previously married)
>
> De facto *relationship for 7 years - no program to suit us.* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *Was not aware of any programs specifically designed to assist couples, one or both of whom had been previously married and had spent lengthy period since with current partner before deciding to remarry.* (female, 46 - 55, divorced)

Others believed that religious beliefs were enough, or they were well suited already, or such a program was not seen as important:

> *We both believe and uphold the Bible's teaching on marriage and believe this is the main issue.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)
>
> *I felt my parents upbringing and also my religious background would be all I needed to have a successful marriage.* (female, under 20, not previously married)
>
> *I feel mature enough to know what marriage is about.* (female, 26 - 35, divorced)
>
> *We had lived together for 5 years and the marriage ceremony was just a formalisation of our commitment to each other. Neither one of us suggested a pre-marriage education program because we don't need it and wouldn't have known where to go if we did (except a church and we don't go to church).* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *Don't believe in it - waste of time.* (male, under 20, not previously married)
>
> *Not seen as an important part of the process.* (female, 36 - 45, widowed)

A few even mentioned that they had attended pre-marriage education prior to a previous marriage, and therefore there was no need to participate again!

> *I have previously attended a course prior to my first marriage, so have some knowledge of them. I have studied communication skills since and think these are the key to success. I do not think the courses run would add a lot of value in terms of communication skills.* (male, 26 - 35, divorced)
>
> *I attended a PMEP prior to my first marriage and found it seemed more like a compatibility testing rather than an education program. The second time around I was more interested in a program that specifically covered family integration when children are involved.* (female, 26 - 35, divorced)
>
> *When I was married before I attended a course - it was beneficial - still did not stop me getting married - and getting divorced.* (male, 36 - 45, divorced)

(2) Belief that marriage is a private matter

The belief that marriage is a private affair and preparation should be only between two people is strongly held by some. The range of responses below demonstrates their strength of feeling:

> *It is not for institutional bodies (religious, political or educational) to dictate or even presume to advise in matters which are the concerns of individuals.* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *If there is a problem between 2 people, I believe they should discuss it themselves.* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)

We felt able to help ourselves in the more basic matters and felt that many courses available would not go to the personal depths that we would be open to. (male, 56 - 65, not previously married)

I do not believe that you should be taught about marriage. It is something that should have a clear mind and you should have thought very hard about, it is a life long commitment. My husband and I talked about marriage for a couple of years. We didn't want a pre-marriage program because we knew what we wanted. (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

We aren't perfect but we have learned from previous mistakes and continue to do so. We all are in command of our own destiny. At the moment we have it all together and would like to think we have enough intelligence to ask for help before things get out of hand, if need be. (male, 26 - 35, divorced)

Both of use believe that we can discuss differences and arrive at a sensible answer. (male, 46 - 55, divorced)

Just not the type of person to seek advice about things such as this. I feel you should be able to cope yourself. (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

My partner and myself had no need to attend pre-marriage education programs due to us solving our own problems. (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

No one can tell you how to have a successful marriage. There are no guarantees in life. Our life together is discussed together only on everything. (male, 25 - 35, not previously married)

The privacy of marriage is evidently a deep-seated attitude. Such comments indicate that it would be most difficult to persuade these couples that pre-marriage education may have some benefit for them.

(3) Belief that pre-marriage education is "counselling" and for couples with problems

Comments clearly demonstrated that many couples see marriage *education* as marriage *counselling* and as relevant only if they were having difficulties. Pre-marriage education was thus seen as appropriate for 'problem couples' in which category they did not see themselves at the time of completing the survey. They therefore saw no need to attend.

Our relationship and love was and is strong enough not to need counselling. (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)

I didn't even contemplate going to pre marital counselling. (male, 46 - 55, divorced)

We didn't have a proper wedding - we eloped and the celebrant didn't mention pre-marriage counselling or anything. (male, 20 - 25, not previously married)

> *The problems that my husband and I had before marriage were not that bad that we couldn't sort them out ourselves.* (female, under 20, not previously married)

Some candidly admitted that they'd already received counselling early in their relationship, and that therefore, by implication, there was no need to go to pre-marriage education.

> *We attended counselling for individual problems early in the relationship.* (female, 26 - 35, divorced)

To a certain extent, what could be inferred from such responses is a belief that pre-marriage education might 'rock the boat' just prior to their wedding, something which is certainly not desired by the great majority of couples.

These statements highlight the potentially important role of the celebrant in addressing misinterpretations of marriage education as marriage counselling and therefore only for couples with problems.

(4) Perceptions of the lack of program relevance

Pre-marriage education programs themselves were frequently mentioned in the non-participants' responses. Beliefs about programs were fuelled by comments from others who had attended them, or their own assumptions, or even in a few cases from personal experience prior to their first marriage. The most common reaction was that the church or religious nature of these programs would not be to their liking:

> *I thought they were all run by the church and full of baloney.* (male, 36 - 45, not previously married)
>
> *Really, the question was never bought up. I'd heard about them but thought mainly Catholic Churches held them for their religion.* (female, 26 - 35, divorced)
>
> *I really hadn't heard much about them, only through a church group which didn't interest me.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)
>
> *I feel couples who attend these course only do so so the church will marry them. I feel they will say and do whatever is expected of them as long as they achieve the end result.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)
>
> *Religion connotations of this counselling a negative.* (female, 36 - 45, divorced)
>
> *My partner was not at all interested in going and the only course I heard of was a Catholic one and the religion side put me off enquiring about the course.* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *If the counselling was welfare or psychologically based we would have gone, but I wasn't going to be Bible bashed.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

It was never seriously suggested to us and because they're usually all religious. (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

Most programs tend to stress religion - communication is far more important. (male, 26 - 35, not previously married)

However, there was the occasional person whose belief was the contrary, that the program would not be religious enough:

I didn't think it would be Christ-centred enough. (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

Other comments unearthed various other beliefs about programs - their target group, the level of discussion on issues, the content, the course climate and, again, their lack of relevance for older or previously married couples:

Pre marriage education programs appeared to me as a means for satisfying church marriage requirements. We were not married in a religious ceremony and the programs bore no relevance to us. (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)

They seem to be aimed at young Christian couples marrying for the first time. (female, 36 - 45, divorced)

Friends had attended and said that issues raised were quite basic and not relevant to people our age and circumstances. (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)

Some of our friends had attended various courses - we had looked at the course notes and decided we didn't wish to attend these types of courses. (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

The idea of sitting in a class room type atmosphere does not appeal. (female, 26 - 35, divorced)

I believe at our age, life experience and our ability to communicate and express issues important to us - that the classes would not be challenging, stimulating or even up to the level we are at. (female, 26 - 35, divorced)

They generally cater for couples who have little or no experience of living together - tend to be pitched at a low level. (male, 26 - 35, not previously married)

No courses available for second marriages. (male, 46 - 55, divorced)

Very few programs are available for people entering their second marriage despite the large number of second marriages. (female, 36 - 45, divorced)

Further comments were forthcoming about cost, professionalism, marketing and the credentials of the educators:

The programs are poorly funded and quite expensive. (female, 36 - 45, divorced)

They do not appear to be professionally run. (male, 26 - 35, not previously married)

They are not well advertised or encouraged. (female, 36 - 45, divorced)

Limitations of counsellors - what qualifications/experience do they have? (female, 36 - 45, divorced)

Finally, there were the comments that indicated simply a lack of knowledge concerning the nature of such programs:

I didn't know what to expect from a pre-marriage education program. (female, 26 - 35, divorced)

All these comments underline the potentially critical role of the celebrant, who is in a position of authority at this point in time and who could also be in an informed position. They also reinforce the need for courses to be as professional as they can be and for educators to be appropriately trained.

(5) Belief that they knew it all anyway

Many exhibited an air of arrogance in their answers. Like the group who believed marriage was a private affair, this group of non-participants would be hard to convince that pre-marriage education could have any value for them whatsoever:

I did not find it necessary to attend any courses about pre-marriage education. On a suitability scale of 1 to 10, we were, are and will always be a 10. (male, 25 - 35, divorced)

I believe that myself and my partner are well suited to each other. (male, 36 - 45, divorced)

Because we are a perfectly matched couple with no problems. And we would not benefit from going to classes. (male, 20 - 25, not previously married)

Too much confidence in myself and my actions. (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)

(6) Belief that there was no time, or they were too busy, before the wedding

The often limited time between finding out about a pre-marriage education program and the wedding, and the busyness of life in preparing for the wedding, were commonly referred to by respondents. The difficulties of shift work were also mentioned.

We both lead very busy lives and for the 6 months prior to the wedding we were setting up a business, hence the time which was left for leisure time was precious and we wanted to spend it relaxing together or with our families. (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

My husband-to-be is a shift worker and I travel out of town once a month for work and there was no program that was flexible enough to allow for these two work commitments. (female, 26- 35, not previously married)

I work an extremely erratic time schedule involving much split shift days and night work. Time commitments are often not known more than 7 days in advance. Attendance at regular sessions very unlikely and certainly not guaranteed. (male, 26 - 35, divorced)

I was very happy with the sessions we had with our priest. Given the amount of pressure and things to do leading up to a wedding we preferred not to commit ourselves to something else as well. (male, 36 - 45, divorced)

These comments raise the question of whether couples are attending, or being recommended to attend, programs too close to the times of their weddings. In this respect, the role of the celebrant is potentially a very significant one.

(7) Belief that other learning pathways to marriage were sufficient

Other learning pathways to marriage were reported than participation in pre-marriage education group programs. Some of these pathways were through self- or couple-direction, for instance, through reading books on marriage:

We had read books on marriage and dealt with most of the issues between ourselves. (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

Yes, my husband and I studied together a book based on Bible values called "Making your marriage and family happy". Our marriage celebrant said it was a fantastic idea and on this basis did not deem it necessary to suggest we attended your course. (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

I've spent the last 25 years reading books on human behaviour and felt no need at all for any further programs. I get on with my partner extremely well after 2 disastrous marriages but it took a lot of self education to know what to look for. (female, 46- 55, divorced)

We had access to many books about marriage, had read a couple of them and talked about many issues in the months before getting married (ie: we felt that marriage education would tell us things we had heard before). (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

Some respondents attended, or had attended at an earlier time(s), various self-development courses and therefore believed that, if pre-marriage education programs were about communication, conflict management skills and other such interpersonal skills, they had no need to participate in such programs. What they tend to be down playing, however, is the *couple-development*, as distinct from the *personal*-development, purpose of marriage preparation.

Both my partner and I have attended human relationship / personal development courses and consider we have a high level of self awareness and good communication and conflict resolution skills. We did not feel that we needed to attend a pre-marriage education program. (female, 36 - 45, not previously married)

Because of our professions - social work and psychology - we feel we have an understanding of the issues covered in pre-marriage education - hence we did not consider it a priority with competing commitments in the build up to marriage. (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

I had attended many courses in the past on communication, negotiation, assertiveness, etc. and felt I had learnt a lot from these. (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)

Studying for a MBA at the time. Interpersonal skills were included in the course - used these to work on own attitudes. Did not consider other group sessions. (female, 36 - 45, not previously married)

Another pathway in the view of many respondents was experiential, that is, learning about marriage through previous marital experience or some other 'adventure'.

Had plenty of education during my first marriage. (male, 36 - 45, divorced)

We had learned from mistakes in earlier disastrous marriages. (female, 56 - 65, divorced)

Both my partner and I had worked on problems we experienced in our prior marriages and agreed not to marry each other until we resolved any differences difficulties in our own relationship. (female, 36 - 45, divorced)

Having been married for more than 30 years and having had years to mull over the many mistakes I made, I was well prepared for this marriage. (female, 46 - 55, divorced)

... to fulfil a life long dream, my wife and I rode horses from Melbourne to Cooktown along the BCT to complete a 14 1/2 month trek across Australia, whilst fully exploring the extremes of our relationship. I consider that spending 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in total isolation and complete dependence on each other is the perfect pre-marriage education program. (male, 20 - 25, not previously married)

Others considered that a talk with their minister was the most meaningful pathway for them.

We attended a private session with the priest. (male, 26 - 35, widowed)

We discussed all relevant marriage issues over several months of meetings with our Minister and this covered our needs. (male, 46 - 55, divorced)

I believe that marriage is so stressful before hand that it seems to add to the pressure. Maybe if when you meet, the Minister talks to you about the things like our Minister did. (female, under 20, not previously married)

(8) Attitude of laziness or lack of motivation

Attitudes of laziness and lack of motivation were acknowledged by some of the respondents as a reason for their non-participation.

Because I am lazy. I would have benefited from it, I know. Any pre-marriage course is beneficial to young couples especially. (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

Couldn't get motivated. (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

(9) Belief that they were not allowed to go, or that their partner was not keen
What is of interest here and in the case above is that the reaction towards pre-marriage education tends to be favourable, but non-participation occurs as a result of other factors, for example, partners not wanting to attend:

> *Because I wasn't allowed to.* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *My husband was just not interested in going. I was very eager to go but he refused. The only available program I knew of was with a Minister.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

(10) Perceptions that time, cost, distance or availability were unsuitable
In some cases, logistics were a real factor in the couples' non-participation:

> *Until 5 weeks before the wedding, I lived in Scotland and my wife was in Australia. It was impossible for us to attend any sort of program together.* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *We lived 200 km away and programs were over several weekends - so not possible to go to all sessions.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)
>
> *We lived in separate towns.* (male, 56 - 65, not previously married)
>
> *I was in the USA until 3 weeks prior to our wedding in Australia. It was impossible to attend as a couple.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

In other instances, couples' attitudes about program cost or availability, or the time available to attend, served as barriers to participation:

> *We were in the middle of rice harvest and it was 1 hour to the town where the courses were held, plus $180 for a day is a rip off.* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *Very limited options being run when we required / were able to attend.* (male, 26 - 45, not previously married)
>
> *No programs offered - do not attend church.* (female, 26 - 35, divorced)
>
> *Mainly because of distance and availability.* (male, 36 - 45, divorced)
>
> *I really wasn't aware of one in our area and I never thought to ask about one.* (female, 36 - 45, divorced)
>
> *I felt that living together for 3 years and being together for 7 years, we knew each other well enough not to attend. Also weddings are very expensive and the programs were an expense that we didn't want to incur or couldn't afford at the time.* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *I didn't know if the course was offered in our town. If we had to travel to a town nearby, we wouldn't have gone.* (female, 20 -25, not previously married)

(11) Didn't think of it

There were many couples who claimed simply that they had never thought of going to pre-marriage education. Evidently no-one had intervened to explain what was on offer, and in a few cases, the response indicated the belief that such programs were only for those marrying in a church.

> *It just didn't occur to me.* (female, 36 - 45, divorced)
>
> *We didn't even think of it. After living together for 2.5 years, we basically knew each other and know how to cope so we didn't consider programs.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)
>
> *General information is not readily available about pre-marriage programs so it didn't occur to us to make an effort to attend.* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *Because we just didn't think about going to a pre-marriage program.* (female, 36 - 45, divorced)
>
> *Never really thought about it. Thought that it was only a prerequisite if married in a church.* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)

These responses indicate a need for more and/or better quality publicity about the potential helpfulness of pre-marriage education and on the nature and range of programs available. The issue of marketing would seem to be important in terms of informing people not only of the nature of program provision but also for whom they are designed.

(12) Unaware of offerings available

In a great many cases, it was a case of couples simply being unaware of the availability of pre-marriage education programs and of information on them:

> *I really wasn't aware of one in our area and I never thought to ask about one.* (female, 36 - 45, divorced)
>
> *My knowledge about programs was not good enough.* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *None were readily advertised in our area so it wasn't in the front of our minds.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)
>
> *Marriage programs are not published enough to get a good exposure. I only heard about them via a work mate who was associated with a church that ran one. By then it was too late.* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *Throughout my life we were not educated in a way that made me aware that these programs are important.* (male, 46 - 55, divorced)
>
> *Didn't know what was offered in area. Not considered so I didn't enquire. (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)*
>
> *Nothing suitable seemed to be about. Poor P.R. from program organisers.* (male, 36 - 45, divorced)

We didn't know about it early enough - thought it was a good idea - unfortunately didn't find time. (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)

Lack of time between decision to marry and actual marriage date. Didn't know of any classes in our area. (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)

These programs are not well publicised and I would have to say that a lack of information about what to expect from them, how much they cost, who runs them and when and where would have been contributing factors as to why my partner and I never attended one of these programs. (female, 36 - 45, divorced)

I was aware that such courses were available but that was about it. I had no idea of the content / costs and therefore never really thought about it. (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)

I don't know where I can get this program. (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)

The reason we did not attend the program is that we do not know where the program is offered, nor any details of the program. We just slightly heard about the existence of such programs. (male, 26 - 35, not previously married)

Made several phone calls all over Australia (Sydney and Melbourne) and the only lead was through the Uniting Church in Melbourne which referred me to a three month course costing $500 on the other side of town (female, 26 - 35, not previously married).

All of these reasons for non-participation, and particularly those relating to a lack of information, have implications for the role of the marriage celebrant. Many respondents simply reported that their minister had not suggested or encouraged attendance for various reasons - for example, because they were unnecessary, or because the decision lay with the couple or because being married by a civil celebrant did not require attendance:

Our priest didn't suggest it so we didn't attend any programs. (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)

The marriage celebrant told us they are not really necessary. (male, 26 - 35, not previously married)

I was unaware of where they were available. The marriage celebrant did not mention it to us. (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

It was not suggested to us by family, friends or Pastor although some had previously attended a program. (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

We weren't encouraged to attend them. (female, 26 - 35, not previously married).

We didn't have a proper wedding - we eloped and the celebrant didn't mention pre-marriage counselling or anything. (male, 20 - 25, not previously married)

Our celebrant didn't mention it so we thought nothing more of it. (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

The Minister who married us didn't push us to attend a pre-marriage program although he said that he would advise us of details if we did want to attend. (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

I think the thought never entered our minds the issue was never brought up by friends, relatives or the celebrant. I guess because we had both been married it wasn't something we thought about. (female, 26 - 35, divorced)

I didn't even think about it and no-one else raised it as a suggestion. (female, 36 - 45, not previously married)

Didn't get encouraged to go by the Minister. (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

We were married by a civil celebrant which did not require attendance at these programs. (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

The main reason we did not attend was that the priest did not advise us of the availability of such courses until 2 weeks before we married. Therefore it was too late to organise. (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)

That so many respondents should comment voluntarily on their celebrant not mentioning anything about programs or not encouraging participation reinforces the findings reported earlier on marriage celebrants' referral practices - or lack thereof. It confirms what an important role celebrants could be playing in informing couples and encouraging participation, provided they are convinced of the advantages of program attendance and informed of their availability and details. This in turn highlights the need for **quality** in the provision of pre-marriage education programs.

How useful would pre-marriage education programs have been as preparation for marriage?

This section analyses the non-participants' judgements on how useful attendance at a pre-marriage education program would have been before marriage, knowing what they know now about married life. The question was completed by both those who did not know of the existence of pre-marriage education programs (n = 304) and those who did know but chose not to participate (n = 640). Their responses are presented in Table 9.7.

Table 9.7
How useful attendance at a pre-marriage education program would have been before marriage

Extent of usefulness	n	%
Very useful	85	10.5
Useful	140	17.3
Somewhat useful	257	31.7
Not at all useful	328	40.5
Missing*	134	
Total	944	100

* These missing data comprise 16 respondents who did not respond, as well as 118 respondents whose Question 3 response was recoded from 'yes' to 'no' in order to maintain consistency on the definition of a pre-marriage education program as a "group" activity - and hence did not answer Question 7.

The potential usefulness of pre-marriage education programs is perceived very differently by non-participants compared with participants (refer to Chapter 8). While 64% of participants had said attendance was "useful" or "very useful", only 28% of non-participants shared the view that attendance would have been "useful" or "very useful". Conversely, only 11% of participants believed attendance was not useful, this figure contrasting with that of 41% for the non-participants. These data reinforce the key point in this chapter that the most important determinants of participation in pre-marriage education appear to be dispositional (personal attitudes and beliefs) rather than situational, extrinsic barriers.

Cross-tabulation of usefulness of program against personal characteristics revealed that there was only one background factor which had a statistically significant effect. Those who had been previously divorced were significantly more likely to perceive programs as being useful as those who had never been divorced (Appendix E)

Presumably, 'once bitten, twice shy', and they were therefore more inclined to see the potential of some kind of educational intervention prior to marriage. This finding is important, in that here are *divorced* non-participants - now in the early days of their second marriage - acknowledging that attendance at a pre-marriage education program would have been useful. It underlines the importance of this study making a closer study of barriers to participation.

Summary

This chapter has explored the issue of non-participation in pre-marriage education programs and has attempted to discover why couples do not attend. An analysis was undertaken of *who* is most likely not to participate, what the stated *reasons* were for not participating, and *how useful* they think it may have been to have attended, now that they had been married for a time.

Those most likely not to participate in pre-marriage education programs are older, not in paid employment or work in managerial or semiskilled/unskilled occupations, have tertiary education other than a bachelor's degree, be of no religion or in the Lutheran or Presbyterian churches, be divorced, and live in a *de facto* relationship prior to their marriage.

The evidence in this chapter indicates that external (situational) factors are not so important as deterrents to participation as internal (dispositional) beliefs and attitudes. This is not to say that external factors are not important in some instances. Clearly, finance, location, transport, child care and significant others played their part as deterrents for some couples. However, overall they were not considered particularly important across the whole sample of non-participants.

What is perceived as more important were the intrinsic factors relating to personal beliefs and attitudes. From the given list of reasons, four stand out prominently as significant - that marriage is a private affair; that there was no need to go to a course; that living with partner meant they didn't have to attend; and that there were no problems in their relationship. Analysis of qualitative responses volunteered by the non-participants confirmed these reasons and indicated what *meaning* these statements had for the couples. Twelve clusters of more specific meanings were derived in this way.

Having explored the many dimensions of non-participation, the next chapter examines the characteristics of programs which might attract at least some of these couples who did not participate.

Chapter 10

Programs preferred by non-participating couples

Chapters 8 and 9 explored the actual pathways to marriage of a group of newly married couples and the role of pre-marriage education in that journey. This chapter now focuses on the types of programs that couples who did not participate in pre-marriage education might consider attending. Such an analysis might provide valuable information to program providers who might seek to attract more of these non-attending couples to their services. In this sense, the chapter is a counterpart to Chapter 7 on celebrants' preferences for programs.

Two groups of respondents were asked for their views. The first are those who knew about pre-marriage education but decided not to attend a program prior to their marriage (those who knew but didn't go). The second are those who indicated that they did not know pre-marriage education programs existed (those who didn't know and didn't go). Data for these two groups are reported separately in this chapter.

In both cases, respondents were presented with a range of program characteristics and circumstances and asked to indicate how likely they would be to attend a program which met that description. Respondents were asked to consider a number of program characteristics:

- nature of the organisation / individual providing the program
- location of the program
- cost of the program
- timing of the program
- number of couples participating in the program
- other more general considerations which might affect participation including the encouragement of the marriage celebrant to attend, the availability of information about the program, its religious content and the availability of child care.

In addition, respondents were asked to state the topics they would have wanted to be covered during a program. They were also asked to identify any further issues that they thought needed to be considered when providing pre-marriage education to couples.

Program characteristics preferred by those who knew of pre-marriage education programs but didn't go

Respondents showed a preference for ***providers*** which were not connected to a church (Table 10.1). Fifty five percent (n = 289) indicated their preference for programs to be conducted by a community organisation such as a Community Health Centre, while 61% (n = 317) reported being "likely" or "very likely" to attend programs conducted in tertiary institutions such as TAFE or a university. This finding is not surprising given that a number of respondents in Chapter 9 indicated that the perceived religious nature of the programs was problematic for them.

Table 10.1
Provider of programs preferred by respondents

Circumstance	Very Likely		Likely		Unlikely		Very Unlikely	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
If the program were run by a church organisation	240	46.0	105	20.1	111	21.3	66	12.6
If the program were run by a tertiary institution (eg TAFE or a university)	191	36.6	126	24.1	157	30.1	48	9.2
If the program were run by a community organisation	146	28.0	143	27.4	196	37.5	37	7.1
If the program were run by a trained professional (eg counsellor, psychologist)	110	21.1	79	15.1	192	36.8	141	27.0

A small number of community-based organisations are already providing pre-marriage education programs, but to date there has been little, if any, experimentation with programs offered by tertiary institutions. TAFE in particular has a strong track record in offering full fee paying courses for people wanting to learn hobbies and attend courses as part of their leisure time activity. This expertise could be tapped through a strategic alliance between current providers and TAFE to provide pre-marriage education programs in a similar manner.

The second point to note from Table 10.1 is the proportion of respondents who thought it likely they would attend a church based program. Two thirds (n = 343) reported that they would be "likely" or "very likely" to attend programs conducted by these organisations. Once again these data are not surprising given that a large number of couples still elect to marry in a church setting, despite having little if any affiliation with the church of their choice (Harris *et al.* 1992:80). A number of interpretations can be offered for these findings. On the one hand, if couples are prepared to marry in a church,

pre-marriage education offered by that church is viewed as an acceptable option. Alternatively, the referral activities of those marriage celebrants with religious affiliations might indicate that some churches are increasingly promoting pre-marriage education as a highly desirable, if not mandatory part of a couple's preparation for their marriage. Couples electing to marry in a church, aware of this situation, are indicating that they are prepared to accept this as part of their pathway to marriage. The preference for church-based organisations therefore may be more a reflection of the acceptance of a reality rather than a clear choice made by the couples concerned (this ritual form of participation was explored in Chapter 1). Cross tabulations of the religious preference of respondents with the nature of the provider reveal significant differences which support these interpretations. Respondents who stated they had no religion indicated they were very unlikely to attend a program conducted by a religious organisation compared with those who gave a religious preference.

Finally, respondents indicated a relatively low likelihood of attending programs conducted by a counsellor or psychologist (36%, n = 189). Couples, given the strong belief that marriage is a private matter and that couples should sort out their own problems (see Chapter 9), viewed providers such as these as less likely sources of pre-marriage education.

On the question of the most appropriate ***location of programs***, couples are more likely to attend city-based programs (Table 10.2). This is certainly true for respondents who live in capital cities and the larger regional centres. What these data also indicate is that respondents might be prepared to travel to attend a program once they had made up their mind. Further analysis of the data revealed that those respondents living in towns of less than 25,000 were more likely to travel to the nearest town to attend a program that their large city counterparts. This is probably a simple reflection of the realities of living in rural and remote areas where travelling to access services is the norm. It may also reflect that these respondents feel more comfortable attending a program which is removed from their local area where they (or their families) are well known.

Table 10.2
Location of programs preferred by couples

Circumstance	Very Likely		Likely		Unlikely		Very Unlikely	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
If the program were run in the local area where I lived	107	20.5	77	14.8	218	41.8	120	23.0
If I had to travel to the nearest town	229	43.9	156	29.9	114	21.8	23	4.4
If the program were held in a capital city	274	52.5	114	21.8	105	20.1	29	5.6

In relation to the ***cost of programs***, eighty seven percent of respondents (n = 447) indicated they would be "likely" or "very likely" to attend programs with fees in excess of $100 (Table 10.3). Further, 64% of respondents indicated they might attend programs with fees between $50 and $100. Only one third of respondents reported they would be likely to attend a program which charged no fees. It would appear from these data that the cost of programs does not figure significantly in couples' decisions to attend programs, although one might assume that each couple's own personal circumstances (for example, if one or both were unemployed or not in the paid workforce) might colour their views on this subject.

The strong preference against free programs might also be explained by belief that "you get what you pay for". By placing a dollar value on programs couples could be indicating that, having chosen to attend a program, they would be prepared to meet the cost of attending a program of reasonable quality. It is interesting to note that in *Love, sex and waterskiing* the average cost of a pre-marriage education program was between $50 and $80, with the lowest cost being $30 and the highest $120 for a residential weekend program. The point that providers of programs might wish to ponder is the message that is sent to couples by the fees they attach to the services they provide.

Table 10.3
Cost of programs preferred by couples

Circumstance	Very Likely		Likely		Unlikely		Very Unlikely	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
If the fee for the program was more than $100	311	59.6	142	27.2	54	10.3	15	2.9
If the program cost between $50 and $100	200	38.3	132	25.3	139	26.6	51	9.8
If the program cost less than $50	149	28.5	83	15.9	185	35.4	105	20.1
If the program were free	112	21.5	60	11.5	152	29.1	198	37.9

In relation to ***when programs might be offered***, respondents in this study indicated a clear preference for programs to be held on weekends (Table 10.4). The strongest preference (71% of respondents) was for a program to be held over two consecutive week-end days - that is, two consecutive Saturdays or Sundays. A program held over one weekend was likely to attract 65% of respondents. Just over one half of respondents (56%) suggested they would be unlikely to commit themselves to a program which extended over a period of 4 weeks, including 17% indicating that this was "very unlikely".

Table 10.4
Timing of programs preferred by couples

Circumstance	Very Likely		Likely		Unlikely		Very Unlikely	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
If the program ran for one night a week for 4 weeks	143	27.4	86	16.5	203	38.9	90	17.2
If the program were held over two consecutive weekends from 10.00am-5.00pm each day	225	43.1	147	28.2	112	21.5	38	7.3
If the program were held over one weekend from 10.00am-5.00pm each day	219	42.0	122	23.4	124	23.8	57	10.9

When considering the ***number of couples*** attending a program, nearly three quarters of respondents clearly believe there is "safety in numbers", indicating they were more likely to attend a program in which more than six couples were participating (Table 10.5). This proportion contrasts with only 41% likely to attend a program involving less than six couples. This could mean that couples believed a bigger group could offer more protection to their privacy than a smaller group where the pressure to participate and share with other couples might be greater.

Table 10.5
Preference for number of couples in programs

Circumstance	Very Likely		Likely		Unlikely		Very Unlikely	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
If the program involved less than six couples	127	24.3	88	16.9	237	45.4	70	13.4
If the program involved more than six couples	244	46.7	141	27.0	120	23.0	17	3.3

On some of the more ***general features*** of programs respondents indicated a clear preference for programs that would provide child care (Table 10.6). While the provision of this type of service would largely depend upon the nature of the client group, it is clearly a feature which is viewed positively by prospective users of programs.

Respondents were almost evenly divided in their views on the ***religious content of programs***. Forty-eight percent (249) of respondents indicated that it would be "likely" or "very likely" for them to attend a program which contained no discussion about religion. Conversely, 52% reported that their attendance was unlikely in these circumstances. These data highlight the diverse opinion that respondents hold on this matter rather than a preference for a particular type of program.

The views of non-participating couples reported in Table 10.6 once again confirm findings reported in Chapter 9. Provision of more information was not likely to bring about any great increase in participation. Only one quarter reported they would be likely to attend programs if there were more information about them. Forty three percent of respondents stated that participation would be "likely" or "very likely" if a marriage celebrant were to recommend attendance. When viewed in the context of the findings discussed in Chapter 9, these data would appear to add further weight to the proposition that it is the nature of the beliefs held about pre-marriage education that is likely to affect attendance at programs and that these beliefs may not be significantly altered by additional information. The key role of the marriage celebrant as a referring agent for pre-marriage education programs is reaffirmed.

Table 10.6
General features of programs

Circumstances	Very Likely		Likely		Unlikely		Very Unlikely	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
If there were more information about what happens at the program	81	15.5	54	10.3	227	43.5	160	30.7
If the marriage celebrant encouraged or recommended me to go	116	22.2	108	20.7	201	38.5	97	18.6
If child care were available during the program	355	68.4	54	10.4	59	11.4	51	9.8
If the program did not contain any discussion about religion	152	29.1	97	18.6	158	30.3	115	22.0

The ranking of the ***topics*** that respondents would have wanted to be covered in a program reveal an emphasis on skills relating to communication and conflict resolution, and the clarification of roles. Topics least favoured for inclusion are those which can be said to focus on the more "negative" side of marriage including divorce, domestic violence, Family Law Act and pre-nuptial contracts.

Table 10.7
Topics that non-participating couples would expect to be included in a pre-marriage education program

Topics	*Number of responses*	*Percentage of responses*
Communication skills	408	8.3
Dealing with conflict	354	7.2
Dealing with differences of opinions	348	7.1
Expectations of marriage	335	6.8
Decision-making and problem solving	317	6.5
Coping with change	315	6.4
Budgeting	299	6.1
Dealing with anger	298	6.1
How to cope with partner's habits	287	5.9
Parenting skills	267	5.5
Roles of husband/wife	255	5.2
Coping with in-laws/family	252	5.1
Sexuality	243	5.0
Family planning	167	3.4
Different family backgrounds	166	3.4
Divorce	129	2.6
Domestic violence	126	2.6
Religion in marriage	116	2.4
Family Law Act	112	2.3
Pre-nuptial contracts	103	2.1
Total responses	4897	99.9

Other suggested topics included (in order) step parenting, second marriages, quality time together, independent hobbies and leisure time, team work / commitment, drugs and liquor, mixed marriages, domestic arrangements, unemployment, stress and fear, sterility and adoptions.

Program characteristics preferred by respondents who didn't know of the existence of pre-marriage education programs

Respondents who stated that they had no knowledge of pre-marriage education programs prior to their marriage were asked to indicate their views on the types of programs which might have encouraged their participation. These data are shown in Appendix E.

The opinions of this group of respondents in all cases mirror those of the group who stated they had known of the existence of such programs. This suggests programs based in community or tertiary institutions, conducted in capital and regional cities, with fees greater than $50 and conducted over some combination of weekend days are likely to attract these couples. However, these respondents are also firm in their beliefs that more information would not necessarily result in their participation. The attitudes and values of these couples in relation to pre-marriage education once again emerge as the more critical factors, and the importance of the marriage celebrant as a referral agent was again reinforced.

The topics that this group of respondents would have liked to be included in a program again emphasise the desire for communication and conflict management skills and indicate lower value be placed on divorce, domestic violence, the Family Law Act, religion in marriage and pre-nuptial agreements (See Appendix E). Other suggested topics (in order of preference) were step parenting, drugs and liquor, second marriages, quality time together, team work / commitment, independent hobbies and leisure, mixed marriages, unemployment, stress and fear, domestic arrangements, illness / incapacitation, sterility and adoption.

Other factors to be considered when providing pre-marriage education

Respondents were invited to identify important factors to be considered when providing pre-marriage education. By far the most common response stressed that ***individual differences*** of couples need to be accommodated within a group setting. Respondents suggested that a number of characteristics needed to be considered, specifically the age of the couples:

> *It depends on the age / experience of the couple. Generally the younger the couple, the more help they can do with* (male, 46 - 55, divorced)
>
> *It would be ideal if there were classes specifically for... marriage in the senior years* (female, 46 - 55, divorced)
>
> *I think the age make up of the groups can be important. Young people can be intimidated by mature, more confident couples* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married)

> *I think programs would have to be able to be adapted to suit the ages of the couples. A program suitable for a couple in their 30's might not be for a couple in their 20's or younger* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married).

their life experiences, including current living arrangements and previous marital experience:

> *The experience and perceived needs of each couple require different levels of education. It is a waste of time for couples with living together experience to sit through a prolonged lessons on matters which presumably they have already resolved and dealt with in their experience* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *Most [programs] are simplistic and do not take into account the fact that you have already brought a house, lived together etc* (female, 25 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *People who have been married before - the needs of older couples are very different from the young who are about to be married for the first time* (female, 46 - 55, divorced)
>
> *It depends on your previous "form"* (male, 36 - 45, divorced)
>
> *In our situation - we had been living together for nine years and had two children - a program would have to deal with different issues that for those entering a marriage with very romantic notions* (female, 36 - 45, divorced)

and their different cultures and backgrounds:

> *Different ethnic backgrounds should also be considered.- regarding the role of the husband and wife* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *Cultural background issues involved are not always the same....*(female, 26 - 35, not previously married).

The need for programs to be able to meet the special needs of some groups of couples was considered an important factor for providers to consider. In particular, the needs of couples marrying for the second or subsequent time were raised, indicating that programs need to be tailored specifically to this group. Some typical comments included:

> *Needs to be a program for the partner entering an instant family at the same time as entering a marriage* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *If it is a second marriage for couples often children from previous marriages have difficulty in coping with the new partner - spouse. Step parenting skills and helping the children to adjust to the new situation would be extremely helpful.* (female, 26 - 35, divorced).

Other groups with special needs included older couples remarrying after the death of a spouse, and disabled couples.

Many comments reflected a perception that pre-marriage education programs should be targeted to, or are only useful for, young couples who were thought to lack the maturity and life experience needed as a basis for marriage:

> *I think young couples (say under 21) and couples who have not lived together at least 2 years should go to pre-marriage programs* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *Programs directed to younger persons who may be lacking in life experience and maturity* (male, 46 - 55, divorced and widowed)
>
> *An advantage to young couples approaching their first marriage...*(male, 36 - 45, divorced).

Respondents provided comments on the ***types of programs*** which they thought might be beneficial. These comments provide some useful ideas for alternative approaches to the provision of pre-marriage education.

> *There needs to be a variety of programs. In our case where we had lived together for 10 years prior to our marriage issues like dealing with the in-laws had already been resolved whereas I would have been quite keen to attend a program on improving our communication skills* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *One-to-one counselling and self awareness issues. Exercises and resources to take way of follow-up counselling sessions* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *Combine individual couple counselling with groups* (female, 26 - 35 not previously married)
>
> *I think couples should be able to answer questions about marriage expectations and each others' opinions in a questionnaire from their own home without counsellors, priests and advisers* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)
>
> *...that it be experientially based, group orientated, not didactic and leader focussed, that it be based on sharing and personal experience, not sitting and listening to leaders talk and give information* (female, 46 - 55, divorced)
>
> *I think it would be more advantageous for some couples to attend a program conducted by a trained professional on a one-to-one basis rather than a group situation to have their individual needs addressed more specifically and openly. A group situation could inhibit in-depth discussion* (female, 46 - 55, divorced)
>
> *Possibly a video for couples to view alone with a questionnaire or similar* (male, 25 - 35, not previously married)

> *Group programs don't fulfil everybody's need or desired means for discussing any factors including marriage* (male, 26 - 35, not previously married).

A number of comments also emphasised the importance of ***providers*** being professional and well trained for their roles. They also acknowledged the important role that happily married couples could play in the delivery of programs.

> *Qualified counsellors / teachers who know what they are talking about, being able to relate to different personalities without bias, opinions or judgements* (male, 20 - 25, not previously married)
>
> *As well as professionally trained counsellors, couples who have succeeded in marriage and are happy to discuss with groups the trials and lessons in life they have learnt through their marriage* (male, 46 - 55, divorced)
>
> *Ensure the people running the classes are happily married as bad vibes can rub off* (male, 20 - 25, not previously married).

Some suggested that the ideal presenter would be the marriage celebrant. These views covered a broad range of opinions. On the one hand, some expressed the opinion that the minister / priest / marriage celebrant was the most appropriate or the only person who should be involved in pre-marriage education:

> *Marriage is a privilege given by God.....I believe a couple and a Minister basis is the most effective and confidential way to work through the many issues of marriage and relationships.* (male, 20 - 25, not previously married)
>
> *I think that the celebrant should have had private sessions when we first visited.....*(female, 20 - 25, not previously married)
>
> *Should be in small groups with the celebrant or religious minister performing the ceremony* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)
>
> *Why not get celebrants trained to do pre-marriage eduction programs so that whilst you are at a session it could be talked about.* (male, 20 - 25, not previously married).

Others suggested that the role of the celebrant be restricted to encouraging couples to attend programs:

> *Perhaps celebrants should make a point of recommending it - even to the extent of making it compulsory - at least one session. I don't know whether it would actually change anything but it would certainly make one think before the big day!* (female, 26 - 35, divorced).

A large number of respondents provided opinions on the ***topics*** and ***issues*** which they believed should be included in a pre-marriage education program. Many of these comments reflected a strong emphasis on topics already included in existing programs (for example, communication, conflict management, coping with change). There were,

however, a significant number of suggestions which highlighted the needs of couples marrying for a second or subsequent time. The following comments are indicative of the issues that these couples believe to be important for them:

> *Discussion where children of one partner present problems to the other partner - questions of loyalty between spouses and children can be problematic. Questions regarding wills and property allocation between spouse and family.* (male, 46 - 55, divorced)
>
> *Ability to deal with step children and former spouses* (female, 36 - 45, not previously married)
>
> *Possibly if there are children from a first marriage problems should be handled first - if both people could be shown how to deal with this. Also partners from domestic violence, try to help them not to make the same mistake twice.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married))
>
> *How to cope with ex-wife and anger between new partner and their ex-partner* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *Divorce appears the easy way out. Couples should be made aware that divorce is not the answer* (male, 36 - 45, not previously married)
>
> *Children from previous marriage. Other forms of abuse other than violence* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)
>
> *Becoming a step parent* (female, 36 - 45, not previously married)
>
> *Awareness of marriage guidance facilities and when to use them. Special accommodation of difficulties facing those who are re-marrying and useful approaches to assist them. Emphasise responsibilities for children even if marriage ends for both parents* (female, 26 - 35, divorced).

The ***place of religion*** in programs was a hotly debated issue in the answers of respondents. While some were very supportive and encouraging of programs based on "biblical principles", other comments articulated an obvious depth of feeling and the opinion that religion and religious groups had little to offer couples.

> *There would seem a need for pre-marriage education programs offered in a religious and non-religious framework as I'm sure there are some who wouldn't attend if the program were only run in a religious context. Others, of course would seek such education through the church and expect it to have a religious basis.* (male, 36 - 45, divorced)
>
> *I don't think they should be religiously based. They should focus on the couples' life together and how to live happily. I think it is very important to change the image of these programs.* (female, 26 - 35, not previously married)
>
> *Leave religion out as this is a personal thing which can be discussed with the minister priest. I am a Catholic but I feel that pre-marriage education courses would be more successful if religion was left out.* (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

I think that religion is brought into this type of counselling (sic) too often. And I have no desire or interest to listen to religious preaching. (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

I think the church should refrain from any involvement with couples. Their views are hypocritical, out-of-date and totally unrealistic....Any pre-marital course should be taught by a marriage guidance counsellor, not the clergy. (female, 20 - 25, not previously married)

..their views on religion - that is, offer courses with religious content and those with none (male, 26 - 35, not previously married)

Perhaps those who administer these social services should keep in mind that not all human beings rely on conventional religion for their morality; not all confine their philosophical or spiritual development to academic textbooks or popular journalism; some of us are interested in a wider and deeper range of literature, experience and the oral / folk traditions of other cultures without being spoon-fed propaganda (female, 26 - 35, not previously married).

Another group of respondents challenged the very basis of pre-marriage education, inferring that education confined to just prior to a wedding was "too little, too late" or only part of a bigger need to support couples throughout their married life together.

I believe pre-marriage education should be introduced at a much earlier level such as early secondary education. By the time a couple is married they feel a false sense of independence regarding marriage. A compulsory pre-marriage awareness program should be offered to secondary students... It seems to me that society is prepared to throw couples to the wolves first and then offer counselling as a first aid remedy (male, 46 - 55, divorced)

I feel pre-marriage education should start much earlier, perhaps even at secondary school level as part of a general social skills program. Education should encourage participants / students to make an intelligent choice of partner. The pitfalls of early marriage before people have had a chance to grow and gain worldly experience should be emphasised (male, 36 - 45, divorced)

Many couples live together before getting married - this should be considered to include such people and offer further development beyond marriage (male, 36 - 45, not previously married)

Why limit them to pre-marriage? I feel many people may realise after being married that there are issues they aren't prepared to cope with (male, 20 - 25, not previously married)

Remarriage program can be extended to encourage couples already in a marriage but wish to strengthen their relationship during a marriage (male, 26 - 35, not previously married).

The focus of this chapter has been on types of programs preferred by couples who did not attend pre-marriage education programs prior to their wedding. While a number of characteristics were analysed, it was significant to note that three quarters of respondents believed increasing the amount of information was not likely to enhance attendance. The important role of the marriage celebrant as a referral agent for programs was further underscored. Forty three percent reported that they would be "likely" or "very likely" to attend if their celebrant had encouraged or recommended them to go.

The final chapter of this book will seek to draw together the main findings from this study and to identify some of the issues and challenges that lie ahead for pre-marriage education in Australia.

Part 5

Conclusions

Chapter 11

Summary and future directions

This study has explored whether participation in pre-marriage education, which forms part of the pathway to marriage often taken and valued by couples planning a church wedding, could be taken up more widely by Australian couples. The findings of this research study need to be understood in relation to its predecessor, *Love, sex and water-skiing* (1992), which surveyed couples' experiences of pre-marriage education. All of these programs had taken place linked to a church wedding following referral from the religious minister whom the couple had arranged to officiate at their wedding. As has been pointed out, the enthusiastic report from a large percentage of these participants valuing the experience and saying that it had helped them approach their marriage with more maturity, had generated interest in exploring nationally whether a similar program could be offered more widely.

Since it was clear from the first study that the celebrant's referral had been critical in getting couples to participate in pre-marriage education, a key task in exploring whether pre-marriage education could be offered more widely was to survey how all religious and civil celebrants practising in Australia felt about involving couples planning to marry in some form of pre-marriage education. The second related task was to investigate how Australian couples, whether planning a church or civil ceremony, felt about pre-marriage education and whether they had attended one or other version of it. The survey also wanted to explore whether couples who had not attended would have been more interested in attending if a course could have been fashioned to meet their needs and interests.

This book began by reflecting on the wedding as a major point where a couple's many journeys singly and then together join the common road of married life. It highlighted the choice and engagement of the marriage celebrant as one of the significant final steps on the pathway to marriage and his or her central role in referring or not referring couples to pre-marriage education. The move into marriage was explored as a personal act of great concern to the couple and a social act of great concern to the families, the churches in many instances and always to the state. The pathway to marriage was thus beset with considerable expectations and learning needs which the couple would be challenged to respond to, with or without the assistance of professionals and organised educational programs.

An analysis of the ways couples spoke of their participation had generated three modes of participation - ritual, religious and educational. Evidence collected from non-participating couples in this study suggests that a ritualistic approach to attending programs is the most common one taken by couples, and that pre-marriage education when recommended by a celebrant is likely to be supported by couples as a required part of their pathway to marriage. For couples in this study, attendance linked to motivations such as seeking to enrich or improve relationships or seeking to prevent problems in relationships did not appear to be high.

The more general question of whether and how people use education to assist their learning occupied the second chapter of this study which examined research findings into participation in adult education programs. The research pointed to a range of personal and situational factors which could affect participation in adult education programs. Cross' study of barriers to participation named three kinds: institutional, dispositional and situational. When applied to participation in pre-marriage education, these factors can be further modified by three popular beliefs about marriage. They are that people should know naturally how to behave in marriage, that marriage is a private affair, and that marriage is in fact a hard road and couples whether prepared or not will usually experience it as difficult.

It was evident that many barriers could restrain couples from participating in pre-marriage education programs. It was also possible that some of the barriers could be overcome. Two of the barriers, situational ones in the first instance, were lack of information and lack of referral, both of which had been in the earlier study overcome by the celebrant's support and information. These considerations of possible barriers and encouragers had led to the survey itself which began by building a profile of the celebrants and the couples gained from the demographic data and then analysing and interpreting their responses.

Celebrants and couples surveyed in the study

Five hundred and forty seven celebrants drawn from all states and territories participated in the research study. Three hundred and thirteen (57% of the sample) were religious celebrants nearly all of whom were men, and 234 (43%) were civil celebrants half of whom were women. Civil celebrants were more heterogeneous in terms of gender and occupation, younger, more "countrified", far less experienced in years of service as a celebrant and yet far more active in numbers of weddings performed, than their religious counterparts.

The couples invited to take part in the survey were selected from those whose marriages were registered in NSW, Victoria and SA in 1993. One quarter had been previously divorced and 3% previously widowed. Fifty six percent had lived with their partner immediately prior to their marriage, while one quarter had lived with their parents. Seventy nine percent of the sample were Australian-born. On available demographic

characteristics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the sample was representative of couples marrying in Australia.

Responses of the marriage celebrants

The survey showed that religious celebrants are more actively involved than civil celebrants in referring couples to pre-marriage education programs. Furthermore, many religious celebrants provided their own pre-marriage education for their bridal couples, regardless of whether these couples attend group programs.

The survey asked those celebrants who said they had *not* encouraged or recommended couples to attend pre-marriage education programs in the past, about their attitudes to programs, referring couples and potential barriers to participation. There were marked differences between the responses of civil and religious celebrants. Religious respondents would feel more comfortable referring to church programs, civil respondents to community/non-church based programs. Their perceptions on the purposes of programs, and the degree to which lack of information and costs were barriers to participation, also differed.

Religious and civil celebrants had a very different idea of their *role*. For example, only 14% of the religious respondents said that encouraging couples to enrol in pre-marriage education programs lay outside their role (compared with 47% of civil respondents); again, only 7% of religious respondents thought that asking couples to attend programs would be imposing on them (compared with 59% of civil respondents). Another difference concerned their views on appropriate providers of pre-marriage education. Sixty two percent of the religious respondents believed the celebrant was the best person to conduct pre-marriage education with the couple (compared with only 20% of civil respondents).

Civil and religious celebrants differed markedly on what they believed pre-marriage education to be and what it might have to offer their bridal couples. Their opinions on circumstances under which they might refer couples to programs differed regarding the program provider, location and cost. On the other hand, their ideas about the *content* that they would expect to be in a program, if they were to refer couples, were similar. The major difference was "religion in marriage" (70% of religious and 30% of civil respondents would expect this topic to be included). These findings on content confirm those from the earlier national study of pre-marriage education programs (Harris *et al.* 1992).

While government encourages celebrants to be active in promoting pre-marriage education with couples, it is apparent from this research that many celebrants are not seeing this as a component of their role, primarily because of their perceptions of the expectations of couples. This is not to say they do not value pre-marriage education programs. In fact, 89% of religious and 63% of civil celebrants believed that pre-marriage programs helped prevent problems before they arose. Also, according to 94% of religious and 61% of civil celebrants, cohabitation does not remove the need for pre-marriage education programs.

Responses of the couples

The very term "pre-marriage education" holds many meanings for couples even among those who participated in programs. What is understood to be pre-marriage education ranges from a chat between couple and celebrant, to undertaking a PREPARE/ FOCCUS questionnaire only, to enrolling in a full-scale adult learning group program.

Although nearly three quarters of the couples surveyed knew of the existence of pre-marriage education programs, less than a quarter of those who had heard of such programs participated in them. Generalising across the total population, this proportion suggests that only 17% of those marrying in Australia attend pre-marriage education programs.

Couples who participated in a pre-marriage education program had usually been encouraged to attend by their minister/priest. Contrastingly, not one respondent attended a program as a result of a suggestion from a civil celebrant. Like the respondents in the previous study (Harris *et al.* 1992), almost two-thirds considered their program "useful" or "very useful", and half stated that what was specifically gained from participation was useful knowledge and skills for their marriage.

The study then attempted to discover why couples do not attend, and an analysis was undertaken of who is most likely not to participate, what the stated reasons were for not participating, and how useful they thought it may have been to have attended, now that they had been married for a time.

A factor analysis highlighted five main clusters of reasons for non-participation in pre-marriage education: lack of interest, time constraints, lack of family encouragement, lack of program relevance and previously married. Open-ended responses provided further valuable insight into the meaning that these particular factors had for couples.

The three-fold typology of barriers to participation developed by Cross (1981) provides one useful example of a classification that can be employed to group reasons why couples did not attend pre-marriage education programs. *Situational barriers* are those arising from one's situation in life at a given time. Ones identified in this study include lack of money, lack of child care, transportation problems, not enough time, and lack of encouragement from family or friends, as well as the key factor of relationship status (that is, the couple already living together or having been previously married). *Institutional barriers* are those practices and procedures that exclude or discourage adults from participating in organised learning activities. From this study, these include inconvenient times or locations for programs, cost of programs, inappropriate programs (for example, content, size of groups and the nature of the provider), lack of information and time needed to attend a program. *Dispositional barriers* are those related to attitudes and self-perceptions about oneself as a learner, or in this case, about the couple as a learning pair. These include being too old to attend pre-marriage education, not enough energy or interest, not enjoying learning groups, tired of classrooms, in addition to the main factors of attitudes to marriage (that it is a natural thing to do, that it is a private matter, that living with partner means there is no point in attending) and attitudes

to learning about marriage (that education is not needed, that such learning implies a troubled relationship or an inability to cope).

While there is a degree of overlap between these categories, the evidence in this study is that the *dispositional* factors - the personal beliefs and attitudes about oneself, coupleness and marriage - are the most significant reasons for non-participation in pre-marriage education. This conclusion is clear, despite the conclusion by Cross that studies tend to report situational factors most frequently and dispositional factors least frequently, mainly because situational barriers tend to be more socially acceptable as reasons for non-participation. This study has demonstrated that the real importance of dispositional barriers may be under-estimated.

This is not to conclude that some barriers in the other two categories were not also important. These included situational factors relating to relationship status and lack of encouragement, and institutional factors relating to lack of information and the nature of programs (especially their perceived religious nature and the images generated by the name "pre-marriage education" were seen to be problematic for many respondents).

Conclusions: Understanding the barriers

This summary of the survey has highlighted four issues which affect participation in pre-marriage education: the celebrant's role and activities, views about marriage which couples and their family and friends hold, the kinds of courses available and how well these programs are described and promoted. Each of these requires attention if participation in pre-marriage education is to be enhanced as a natural and regular component in a couple's pathway to marriage.

The celebrant's role and activities

The effect of the survey has been to highlight the complexity and centrality of the role, knowledge and attitudes of the celebrant in weddings and marriages. It has become clear that the couple's wedding is also the celebrant's. While couples can expect that their desires for modifications to their wedding and the processes surrounding it, bolstered by their unique standing as key players in their own wedding, will be fulfilled as far as possible, it is often overlooked that the celebrant is also a major stakeholder with similar leverage. He or she may have desires and interests concerned with the marriage which, again, if they are within agreed bounds, can expect to be followed. In other words, the celebrant has a major role in shaping the pathway to marriage and his or her engagement is critical.

As a state-sponsored institution, marriage has involved the engagement of an official representative of the state whose task is to ensure that the marriage has the validity of a freely entered, adult contract that will be binding for life. The role of the state and its representative, the celebrant, in marriage has always been to a greater or lesser extent

a regulatory intervention through which the state's idea of marriage is juxtaposed with the ideas of marriage held by couples. Even under the present minimal requirements, the celebrant must ensure that the couple or one or other partner are not under duress since this would invalidate the freedom component of the marriage contract.

Other dimensions of marriage have not as yet been scrutinised by the state to the same extent as they have by churches. One main question concerns the maturity of the couple's deliberation - it is one thing to be free of duress as one approaches the altar, it is another to have a solid sense of what the marriage is going to mean in the years ahead. Where couples appear to have little idea of what they are doing and where increasingly couples are not enmeshed in larger social systems like extended families in which their perhaps immature relationship could be somewhat nurtured and protected, there may be a realisation that the couples don't really know what they are doing in a fully adult sense. Where this appears to be the case, the state celebrant has no power to postpone the marriage or refuse to perform the ceremony, nor indeed as we have seen would he or she feel in many cases that such concern were part of the celebrant's role. Church-based celebrants on the other hand, who traditionally have a pastoral role, are more inclined to be concerned with the maturity of the couple's decision to marry. They will often spend time with couples helping them think through the implications of their intended marriage or will refer them to an educational program.

Civil celebrants have tended to restrict their role to that of official witness and ceremonial leader at the wedding. Religious celebrants extend their role as official witness to include a pastoral role which they implement in a priestly, prophetic or professional way according to their ministerial style. If celebrants are to take on the role of referrer, civil celebrants will need to take a more professional pastoral interest in the couples seeking to be married. Conversely, it puts some professional expectation on religious ministers to extend their interest from matters purely religious. For some ministers - those of a professional bent - this would not involve much change, but for others - those with a more priestly and prophetic style - it could be a considerable extension of their role.

Views about marriage held by couples, families and friends

It became clear from many respondents that the idea of education for marriage was perceived incongruously. Marriage, particularly in its trouble-free beginnings, was not seen as an appropriate matter for education. It was seen as a private affair in preparation for which there was no need to go to a group program. Things to be learnt could be managed by the couples and their families and friends. These recurring notions of marriage have a strong basis in popular culture and in the resistance of people to the intrusion of bureaucracies whether state or church into their private lives. The existence of other dimensions of marriage besides those immediately visible to young lovers which require information and a range of interpersonal skills can be raised again most easily by the celebrant.

The nature of pre-marriage education programs

The restriction of pre-marriage education to group programs has been challenged by both celebrants and couples in this study. Pre-marriage education is interpreted to mean many things - an informal chat about the wedding service, the handing out of a pamphlet, reading a book, Bible studies, completing inventories such as PREPARE or FOCCUS, spending time riding horses on a holiday together - all were interpreted by couples and celebrants as the "many faces of pre-marriage education". The value of lived experience as a *de facto* couple or in a previous marriage was seen by some couples and some celebrants as providing the type of educative experiences needed as a precursor to marriage.

In addition, non-participating couples and non-referring celebrants had three reservations about existing program provision. These were, firstly, the purported religious nature of programs; secondly, the confusion over the difference between counselling and education (with these two terms often being used interchangeably and consequently carrying a therapeutic overtone); and finally, the value of programs for divorced and *de facto* couples.

Clarification and promotion of pre-marriage education

A major issue concerns the way pre-marriage education is perceived and valued. The foundation for why a large proportion of couples did not participate (even though they knew of such programs) is at least partially due to particular ideas about these programs (for example, that they are church-sponsored and intrusive; that they are suitable for young couples entering their first marriage but not for older couples, divorcees re-marrying or those already living in *de facto* arrangements). Such ideas may apply to some but certainly not to all existing or possible programs. Alternative views of pre-marriage education based on non-intrusive and facilitative programs need to be promoted more widely, both publicly for all couples thinking about marriage and particularly among marriage celebrants.

Questions for future reflection and action

- Given the key role they play, to what extent and how should religious and civil celebrants be recruited and trained to be referrers?

- In what ways could some of the less individualised dimensions of marriage, for which a person needs the skills of communication and conflict resolution, be explored and explained in all forms of media so that couples might broaden their view and seek to gain the appropriate skills?

- To what extent is it possible for pre-marriage education programs (suitably named and made more inclusive to include couples other than young people marrying

for the first time) to be diversified and offered by trained educators at appropriate sites at appropriate times?

- Should pre-marriage education be re-named to define itself more precisely as education and not therapy nor proselytism, and actively promoted through a public education campaign using various forms of media?

A final word

We have explored a range of pathways leading to marriage, some of which included various forms of pre-marriage education and others that didn't. We have seen that the roles of civil and religious celebrants differ in several key ways and that it is the celebrants' intervention which seems to be a key factor in couples choosing to participate in pre-marriage education. It remains to be seen whether more Australian couples immersed in the shaky world of modern life will include pre-marriage education in their wedding preparation. If the issues which emerged through this study (and listed above) are tackled, an increase in participation could be expected, although it needs to be remembered that many couples, no matter how sensitively and appropriately they are catered for, will still choose to make their own private pathway to marriage that will not incorporate forms of pre-marriage education.

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APPENDIX A

Office of Legal Aid and Family Services
Attorney - General's Department

The Attorney-General's Department and the Peak Bodies for marriage education in Australia (the Australian Association for Marriage Education and the Catholic Society for Marriage Education) are jointly undertaking a research project to gain some information about the usage of pre-marriage education programs.

Pre-marriage education programs are designed to provide couples with opportunities to think about their relationship prior to marriage and to learn skills in areas such as communication and conflict resolution. These programs are offered by a number of church and community organisations.

This questionnaire has been designed to collect information about your usage of pre-marriage education programs, and the types of programs you might suggest couples attend.

Most questions require you to circle an answer or tick a box. Only a few require short written answers.

1. This question is asking for a few details about yourself so that we can determine whether we have obtained a representative sample of Marriage Celebrants.

(a) Sex (please circle) Male Female

(b) Age (please circle)

17 - 25
26 - 35
36 - 45
46 - 55
56 - 65
over 65

(c) Your occupation _____

(d) Language spoken in your home _____

(e) Where do you currently live? (please circle only one response)

Town, less than 2,500 people
Town 2,500 to 25,000
Small city 25,000 to 100,000
Large city, over 100,000

(f) Your postcode _____

(g) How many years have you been a marriage celebrant? _____ years

(h) How many weddings did you perform in:

1991? _____ weddings

1992? _____ weddings

(i) Do you perform marriages as a: (please circle only one response)

Civil Celebrant?
Religious Marriage Celebrant?

2. Have you encouraged couples to attend a pre-marriage education program (PMEP) in the past?

YES (Please answer **Question 3 only)**

NO (Please go to **Question 4**, and then complete **all** remaining questions)

3. (a) Which organisation (s) did you refer couples to?

(b) What were your reasons for encouraging your couples to attend PMEPs with this / these particular organisation(s)?

(c) What information, if any, did you give to your couples about the PMEP you encouraged them to attend?

(d) How many couples approximately did you encourage to attend PMEPs in:

1992? _____ couples

1991? _____ couples

4. We would like to collect some information about YOUR opinions of pre-marriage education. Please circle the number which most represents how you think about each of the statements given below.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
A Pre-marriage education programs are for couples who have problems	5	4	3	2	1
B It is outside my role as a celebrant to encourage couples to attend pre-marriage programs	5	4	3	2	1
C I would feel comfortable asking couples to attend a pre-marriage education program run by a church organisation	5	4	3	2	1
D Pre-marriage education programs help to prevent problems before they arise	5	4	3	2	1
E It is more important for couples marrying for a second time to attend a pre-marriage education program	5	4	3	2	1
F I feel it would be imposing on a couple if I were to ask them to attend a program before they marry	5	4	3	2	1
G I think there isn't enough information available for couples and celebrants about pre-marriage education programs	5	4	3	2	1
H I believe the marriage celebrant is the best person to do some marriage education with the couple before they are married	5	4	3	2	1
I I do not refer couples to pre-marriage education programs because there are no programs available in my area	5	4	3	2	1

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
J Couples who live together before marriage do not need to attend a pre-marriage education program	5	4	3	2	1
K I would feel comfortable asking couples to attend a pre-marriage education program run by a community/ non-church organisation	5	4	3	2	1
L With all the other expenses associated with getting married, the couples have difficulty in affording the costs associated with attending a pre-marriage education program	5	4	3	2	1

5. Do you **personally** provide any form of pre-marriage education for the couples you marry?

❑ YES

❑ NO

If yes, please describe the pre-marriage education you provide for your couples

The following three questions ask you to think about the type of pre-marriage education program you would like your couples to attend **if you were to refer them to one**.

Please circle the number that most closely represents your ideas.

4 = Very likely
3 = Likely
2 = Unlikely
1 = Very unlikely

6. If I were to refer couples to a PMEP I would refer them to a program conducted by:

(a)	Marriage Guidance	4	3	2	1
(b)	a church organisation	4	3	2	1
(c)	a tertiary education institution (eg TAFE)	4	3	2	1
(d)	a psychologist / counsellor	4	3	2	1
(e)	another organisation / person	4	3	2	1

Please specify: _____

7. I would refer couples to a program if one were available in

(a)	the local area	4	3	2	1
(b)	the nearest regional town	4	3	2	1
(c)	a capital city	4	3	2	1
(d)	another location	4	3	2	1

Please specify: _____

8. I would refer couples to a program if:

(a)	there was no expense involved	4	3	2	1
(b)	the fee was less than $50	4	3	2	1
(c)	the fee was less than $100	4	3	2	1
(d)	the fee was more than $100	4	3	2	1

9. There are a wide range of topics which could be covered during a pre-marriage education program. Please indicate which of the following topics you would expect to be included in a program.

Please tick as many boxes as you need to.

- ❑ Budgeting
- ❑ Communication skills
- ❑ Compatibility
- ❑ Coping with change
- ❑ Dealing with anger
- ❑ Dealing with conflict
- ❑ Decision making and problem solving
- ❑ Different family backgrounds
- ❑ Divorce
- ❑ Domestic violence
- ❑ Expectations of marriage
- ❑ Family Law Act
- ❑ Family planning
- ❑ Parenting skills
- ❑ Pre-nuptial contracts
- ❑ Religion in marriage
- ❑ Roles of husband/wife
- ❑ Sexuality

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please return it to the researchers at the University of South Australia using the reply-paid envelope enclosed.

APPENDIX B

University of South Australia
Centre for Human Resource Studies

Pre-marriage education programs are programs run by church and community organisations for groups of couples. They are designed especially for couples who are in the process of making, or have made, a decision to marry.

The Centre for Human Resource Studies, together with the national bodies responsible for the development of marriage education programs in Australia, are jointly undertaking a research project to gain some information about the usage of pre-marriage education programs. This project is being funded by a grant from the Office of Legal Aid and Family Services in the Federal Attorney-General's Department.

This questionnaire has been designed to collect information on your ideas about *attending* pre-marriage education programs. We are also interested in your opinions about the *types of programs* which couples like yourselves might attend.

Most questions require you to circle an answer or tick a box. Only a few require short written answers.

1. So that we can be sure that we have drawn a representative sample of couples who have recently married, we are asking you for some background information. Please tick the appropriate boxes.

(a) Sex:
- ❑ female
- ❑ male

(b) Age:
- ❑ under 20
- ❑ 20 - 25
- ❑ 26 - 35
- ❑ 36 - 45
- ❑ 46 - 55
- ❑ 56 - 65
- ❑ over 65

(c) Your occupation:
- ❑ clerical (eg secretary, teacher's aide)
- ❑ managerial
- ❑ professional (eg doctor, lawyer, teacher)
- ❑ sales and personal services (eg sales assistant, child care worker, bank teller)
- ❑ student
- ❑ trade (eg cook, mechanic, hairdresser)
- ❑ not in paid workforce
- ❑ other (please specify)

(d) What is the highest level of education you completed?
- ❑ Year 11 or less
- ❑ Year 12
- ❑ Trade / apprenticeship
- ❑ Certificate from TAFE / business college
- ❑ Tertiary diploma
- ❑ Bachelor's degree
- ❑ Postgraduate diploma or higher degree

(e) Religion:

- ❑ none
- ❑ Anglican
- ❑ Baptist
- ❑ Catholic
- ❑ Churches of Christ
- ❑ Lutheran
- ❑ Orthodox
- ❑ Presbyterian
- ❑ Uniting Church
- ❑ Other (please specify):

_____

(f) When did you marry? _____ month

_____ year

(g) Have you ever been:

Yes	No	
❑	❑	divorced?
❑	❑	widowed?

(h) Immediately before your marriage, did you:

- ❑ live with your parents?
- ❑ live with your partner?
- ❑ live with others?
- ❑ live alone?

(i) Country of birth:

_____ self

_____ mother

_____ father

(j) Before your marriage did you live in:

- ❑ a town, less than 2,500 people?
- ❑ a town, 2,500 and 25,000 people?
- ❑ a small city, 25,000 and 100,000 people?
- ❑ a large city, over 100,000 people?

The following questions ask you to think about any pre-marriage education you might have attended before your marriage. Pre-marriage education programs are run by various church and community organisations for **groups of couples.**

2. Prior to your marriage, did you know that there were pre-marriage education programs (for **groups** of couples) which people like yourselves could attend?

   ❑ Yes (if YES, please go to **Question 3**)
   ❑ No (if NO, please **go to Question 7 and then complete ALL remaining questions**)

3. Prior to your marriage, did you attend any pre-marriage education programs for **groups** of couples?

   ❑ Yes (if YES, please answer **Question 4 ONLY**)
   ❑ No (if NO, please **go to Question 5 and then complete ALL remaining questions**)

4. If you attended a pre-marriage education program, what kind of program was it?

   (a) Formal group program run by an agency / organisation?

   ❑ yes ❑ no

   If yes, briefly describe the program.

   (b) Who suggested that you attend a pre-marriage education program? Please tick as many boxes as apply to you

   ❑ Minister / priest
   ❑ Civil marriage celebrant
   ❑ Friends
   ❑ Parents
   ❑ Other family
   ❑ Myself
   ❑ My partner
   ❑ Other: please specify

(c) Knowing what you know now about marriage, how useful do you think the pre-marriage education program has been for your marriage?

- ❑ Very useful
- ❑ Useful
- ❑ Not useful
- ❑ Not at all useful

Please give your reasons for this.

5. There are many reasons why couples do not attend pre-marriage education programs. Look at the reasons given in the list below and decide ***how important each one*** was in your decision not to participate in a pre-marriage education program.

Please circle only one response for each reason.
If a reason is not applicable for you, circle number 1.

How important was each reason in your decision not to attend a pre-marriage education program?

Reason	Not important	Slightly important	Somewhat important	Quite important	Very important
Because I didn't think the program would meet my needs	1	2	3	4	5
Because the programs available did not seem interesting	1	2	3	4	5
Because I believe it is best for us as a couple to sort out our own problems	1	2	3	4	5
Because I was not confident of my learning ability	1	2	3	4	5
Because I don't enjoy going to programs	1	2	3	4	5
Because the programs available did not seem useful	1	2	3	4	5
Because my partner did not want to go	1	2	3	4	5
Because I did not want to discuss personal issues with other people	1	2	3	4	5

Reason	Not important	Slightly important	Somewhat important	Quite important	Very important
Because we could not afford the fees for the program	1	2	3	4	5
Because the programs available were of poor quality	1	2	3	4	5
Because I didn't think I could attend regularly	1	2	3	4	5
Because of the time required to finish the program	1	2	3	4	5
Because my family did not encourage us to attend	1	2	3	4	5
Because I wanted to learn something specific and the program seemed too general	1	2	3	4	5
Because we did not have any problems in our relatinship	1	2	3	4	5
Because our friends did not encourage us to attend	1	2	3	4	5
Because I wasn't willing to give up my leisure time	1	2	3	4	5
Because the program was at an inconvenient location	1	2	3	4	5
Becasue our minister/priest did not encourage us to attend	1	2	3	4	5
Because my partner and I had lived together before we married	1	2	3	4	5
Because of transportation problems	1	2	3	4	5
Because the program was offered at an inconvenient time	1	2	3	4	5
Because I'm not interested in attending programs	1	2	3	4	5
Because I thought the program would have a lot of religion in it	1	2	3	4	5
Because we could not get financial assistance to attend the program	1	2	3	4	5
Because attending the program would take away time I would spend with my family	1	2	3	4	5
Because I have been married before	1	2	3	4	5

Reason	Not important	Slightly important	Somewhat important	Quite important	Very important
Because we had trouble arranging child care	1	2	3	4	5
Because we had too many things to do	1	2	3	4	5
Because my partner has been married before	1	2	3	4	5
Because I thought that the program would raise sensitive issues that we had not dealt with	1	2	3	4	5
Because I didn't think we needed to go to a course about marriage	1	2	3	4	5

6. Are there any additional reasons why **you** did not attend a pre-marriage education program?

7. Knowing what you know now about marriage, how useful would it have been for you to attend a pre-marriage education program before your marriage?

- ❑ Very useful
- ❑ Useful
- ❑ Somewhat useful
- ❑ Not at all useful

8. Did you and your partner attend any sessions with your marriage celebrant before you were married?

- ❑ yes
- ❑ no

If yes,

(a) how many sessions did you attend?

_____

(b) what topics did you discuss during these sessions?

_____

_____

_____

(c) did you complete a questionnaire such as PREPARE, FOCCUS or P.M.I?

- ❑ yes
- ❑ no

If yes, how many sessions did you take to do this?

_____

9. We would now like you to think about the type of pre-marriage education program you would have liked to have attended **IF you were to have gone to one.**

Look at the circumstances given in the list below and decide ***how likely each one*** would be for you.

Please circle only one response for each circumstance. If a circumstance is not applicable for you, circle number 1.

How likely it would be for you to attend a program

Circumstance	Very likely	Likely	Unlikely	Very unlikely
If the program were run by a church organisation	4	3	2	1
If the program were run in the local area where I live	4	3	2	1
If I had to travel to the nearest town	4	3	2	1
If the program were held in a capital city	4	3	2	1

Circumstance	Very likely	Likely	Unlikely	Very unlikely
If the program were run by a tertiary institution (eg TAFE or a University)	4	3	2	1
If the program were run by a trained professional (eg counsellor, psychologist)	4	3	2	1
If the fee for the program was more than $100	4	3	2	1
If the program was held in a community centre (eg a Community Health Centre or YMCA)	4	3	2	1
If the program cost less than $50	4	3	2	1
If the program were free	4	3	2	1
If the program were held over one weekend, from 10.00-5.00 each day	4	3	2	1
If the program cost between $50 and $100	4	3	2	1
If the program ran for one night a week for 4 or 5 weeks	4	3	2	1
If the program were held over two consecutive week-end days, from 10.00-5.00 each day	4	3	2	1
If the program were run by a community organisation	4	3	2	1
If the program involved less than six couples	4	3	2	1
If there were more information about what happens at the programs	4	3	2	1
If the marriage celebrant encouraged or recommended me to go	4	3	2	1
If child care was available during the program	4	3	2	1
If the program involved more than six couples	4	3	2	1
If the program did not contain any discussion about religion	4	3	2	1

10. There are a wide range of topics which could be covered during a pre-marriage education program. **If you were to have attended a program**, which of the following topics would **you** have wanted covered during the program?

Please tick as many boxes as you need to

- ❑ Budgeting
- ❑ Communication skills
- ❑ Coping with change
- ❑ Coping with in-laws and family
- ❑ Dealing with anger
- ❑ Dealing with conflict
- ❑ Dealing with differences of opinions
- ❑ Decision making and problem solving
- ❑ Different family backgrounds
- ❑ Divorce
- ❑ Domestic violence
- ❑ Expectations of marriage
- ❑ Family Law Act
- ❑ Family planning
- ❑ How to cope with my partner's habits
- ❑ Parenting skills
- ❑ Pre-nuptial contracts
- ❑ Religion in marriage
- ❑ Roles of husband/wife
- ❑ Sexuality
- ❑ Other:

10. Are there any other factors that you think should be considered in providing pre-marriage education programs?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please return it to the researchers at the University of South Australia using the reply-paid envelope enclosed.

APPENDIX C

New South Wales

	No. of registered celebrants*	No. of marriages**	% of marriages***
Catholic	1640	8472	25.9
Anglican	977	5989	18.3
Uniting Church	653	3756	11.5
Presbyterian	256	970	3.0
Orthodox	72	1140	3.5
Baptist	468	639	2.0
Lutheran	53	118	0.4
Church of Christ	169	198	0.6
Civil	263	11428	34.8
Total	4551	32710	100

Victoria

	No. of registered celebrants*	No. of marriages**	% of marriages***
Catholic	1247	6736	27.2
Anglican	834	3495	14.1
Uniting Church	772	2926	11.8
Presbyterian	140	300	1.2
Orthodox	70	1205	4.9
Baptist	304	483	2.0
Lutheran	75	203	0.8
Church of Christ	202	410	1.7
Civil	171	8986	36.3
Total	3815	24744	100

Queensland

	No. of registered celebrants*	No. of marriages**	% of marriages***
Catholic	514	3671	21.6
Anglican	496	2653	15.6
Uniting Church	408	2074	12.2
Presbyterian	104	406	2.4
Orthodox	11	101	0.6
Baptist	279	357	2.1
Lutheran	115	422	2.5
Church of Christ	10	246	1.4
Civil	164	7085	41.6
Total	2101	17015	100

Tasmania

	No. of registered celebrants*	No. of marriages**	% of marriages***
Catholic	72	426	16.0
Anglican	128	676	25.4
Uniting Church	59	263	9.9
Presbyterian	13	31	1.2
Orthodox	1	10	0.4
Baptist	45	102	3.8
Lutheran	3	5	0.2
Church of Christ	17	21	0.8
Civil	27	1124	42.3
Total	365	2658	100

South Australia

	No. of registered celebrants*	No. of marriages**	% of marriages***
Catholic	235	1530	20.2
Anglican	238	788	10.4
Uniting Church	179	1537	20.3
Presbyterian	8	39	0.5
Orthodox	31	291	3.8
Baptist	116	194	2.6
Lutheran	204	448	5.9
Church of Christ	82	185	2.4
Civil	69	2562	33.8
Total	1162	7574	100

Western Australia

	No. of registered celebrants*	No. of marriages**	% of marriages***
Catholic	254	1907	20.9
Anglican	288	1299	14.2
Uniting Church	179	801	8.8
Presbyterian	11	43	0.5
Orthodox	11	96	1.0
Baptist	108	166	1.8
Lutheran	11	58	0.6
Church of Christ	90	185	2.0
Civil	110	4586	50.2
Total	1062	9141	100

Australian Capital Territory

	No. of registered celebrants*	No. of marriages**	% of marriages***
Catholic	74	437	31.9
Anglican	73	247	18.0
Uniting Church	38	157	11.4
Presbyterian	3	57	4.1
Orthodox	6	29	2.1
Baptist	12	14	1.0
Lutheran	10	15	1.1
Church of Christ	6	11	0.8
Civil	14	405	29.5
Total	236	1372	100

Northern Territory

	No. of registered celebrants*	No. of marriages**	% of marriages***
Catholic	35	109	30.0
Anglican	19	30	8.3
Uniting Church	19	85	23.5
Presbyterian	1	-	0
Orthodox	1	27	7.5
Baptist	8	8	2.2
Lutheran	6	19	5.2
Church of Christ	1	-	0
Civil	13	84	23.2
Total	103	362	100

* Number of Registered Celebrants: source Attorney-General's Department

** Number of marriages: source ABS

*** Percentage of weddings: each denomination calculated as a percentage of those contained in the sample

APPENDIX D

Civil and religious celebrants' opinions of pre-marriage education (t-tests)

	Means: Civil Religious	Standard deviation: Civil Religious	t-value	Degrees of freedom	2-tailed prob.
(a) Pre-marriage education programs are for couples who have problems	2.80 2.16	1.348 1.443	3.70	262	.000
(b) It is outside my role as a celebrant to encourage couples to attend pre-marriage education programs	3.28 1.83	1.157 1.206	10.09	276	.000
(c) I would feel comfortable asking couples to attend a pre-marriage education program run by a church organisation	2.54 4.33	1.290 1.026	-12.38	273	.000
(d) Pre-marriage education programs help to prevent problems before they arise	3.66 4.39	1.053 0.780	-6.43	271	.000
(e) It is more important for couples marrying for a second time to attend a pre-marriage education program	2.85 3.49	1.188 1.243	-4.34	273	.000
(f) I feel it would be imposing on a couple if I were to ask them to attend a program before they marry	3.58 1.63	1.209 0.877	14.83	277	.000
(g) I think there isn't enough information available for couples and celebrants about pre-marriage education programs	3.83 3.50	1.056 1.096	2.56	271	.011*
(h) I believe the marriage celebrant is the best person to do some marriage education with the couple before they are married	2.25 3.60	1.167 1.118	-9.70	277	.000

	Means: Civil Religious	Standard deviation: Civil Religious	t-value	Degrees of freedom	2-tailed prob.
(i) I do not refer couples to pre-marriage education programs because there are no programs available in my area	3.08 2.81	1.289 1.411	1.60	261	.111**
(j) Couples who live together before marriage do not need to attend a pre-marriage education program	2.54 1.54	1.098 0.969	7.82	273	.000
(k) I would feel comfortable asking couples to attend a pre-marriage education program run by a community/non-church organisation	3.52 3.23	1.113 1.106	2.13	271	.034*
(l) With all the other expenses associated with getting married, the couples have difficulty in affording the costs associated with attending a pre-marriage education program	3.52 2.50	1.147 1.193	7.07	267	.000

* significant at the 0.05 level

** not significant

Civil and religious celebrants' opinions of the types of pre-marriage education programs they would like couples to attend if they were to refer them to one (t-tests)

	Means: Civil / Religious	Standard deviation: Civil / Religious	t-value	Degrees of freedom	2-tailed prob.
Refer to a community organisation	3.49 2.45	.744 .829	9.81	222	.000*
Refer to a church organisation	2.29 3.79	1.111 .526	-13.35	220	.000*
Refer to a tertiary institution	2.66 1.98	1.024 .858	4.93	185	.000*
Refer to a psychologist	2.45 2.42	1.152 .887	.22	193	.829
Refer to another organisation	2.19 2.05	1.143 1.018	.82	150	.411
Refer if in the local area	3.64 3.68	.677 .667	-.60	265	.552
Refer if in the nearest regional town	2.73 3.72	1.008 1.034	0.05	157	.962
Refer if in a capital city	1.97 2.02	1.014 1.032	-.32	145	.747
Refer to another location	1.64 1.66	.866 .848	-.11	119	.912
Refer if no expense involved	3.69 3.52	.634 .819	1.95	258	0.052
Refer if fee was less than $50	3.00 3.38	.924 .792	-3.17	197	.002*
Refer if fee was less than $100	2.97 2.64	1.019 1.073	-6.46	292	.000*
Refer if fee is more than $100	1.40 1.74	.721 .936	-2.57	163	.011**

* significant at the 0.01 level
** significant at the 0.05 level

APPENDIX E

Key factors acting as barriers to participation

Factor 1: Lack of interest

- 'Because I don't enjoy going to programs' (0.67666)
- 'Because I wasn't willing to give up my leisure time' (0.65031)
- 'Because I'm not interested in attending programs' (0.74377)

Factor 2: Time constraints

- 'Because I didn't think I could attend regularly' (0.74071)
- 'Because of the time required to finish the program' (0.69527)
- 'Because the program offered was at an inconvenient time' (0.70819)

Factor 3: Lack of family encouragement

- 'Because my family did not encourage us to attend' (0.65946)

Factor 4: Lack of program relevance

- 'Because I didn't think the program would meet my needs' (0.70575)
- 'Because the programs available did not seem interesting (0.70297)
- 'Because the programs available did not seem useful' (0.71381)
- 'Because the programs available were of poor quality' (0.71495)

Factor 5: Previously married

- 'Because I have been married before' (0.82021)
- 'Because my partner has been married before' (0.82567)

Cross-tabulation of usefulness of pre-marriage education program by whether they had ever been divorced

Ever been divorced?	n	mean	SD	t-value	d.f.	sig.
Previously divorced	163	2.88	1.102	-3.83	516	.000
Never divorced	355	3.23	0.885			

Types of programs preferred by couples who did not know of the existence of programs

Circumstance	Very Likely		Likely		Unlikely		Very Unlikely	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
If the program were run by a church organisation	166	54.6	52	17.1	57	18.8	29	9.5
If the program were run by a community organisation	80	26.3	83	27.3	115	37.8	26	8.6
If the program were run by a tertiary institution eg TAFE or a university	114	37.5	78	25.7	79	26.0	33	10.9
If the program were run by a trained professional (eg counsellor, psychologist)	70	23.0	54	17.8	117	38.5	63	20.7
If the program were run in the local area where I lived	60	19.7	55	18.1	119	39.1	70	23.0
If I had to travel to the nearest town	151	49.7	78	25.7	64	21.1	11	3.6
If the program were held in a capital city	179	58.9	66	21.7	47	15.5	12	3.9
If the fee for the program was more thah $100	214	70.4	72	23.7	14	4.6	4	1.3
If the program cost between $50 and $100	144	47.4	79	26.0	70	23.0	11	3.6
If the program cost less than $50	103	33.9	54	17.8	114	37.5	33	10.9
If the program were free	55	18.1	31	10.2	103	33.9	115	37.8
If the program ran for one night a week for 4 weeks	100	32.9	45	14.8	117	38.5	42	13.8
If the program were held over one weekend, from 10.00am-5.00pm each day	151	49.7	66	21.7	65	21.4	22	7.2

Circumstance	Very Likely		Likely		Unlikely		Very Unlikely	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
If the program were held over two consecutive week-end days, from 10.00am-5.00pm each day	148	48.7	82	27.0	64	21.1	10	3.3
If the program involved less than six couples	72	23.7	49	16.1	141	46.4	42	13.8
If the program involved more than six couples	107	35.2	83	27.3	91	29.9	23	7.6
If there were more information about what happens at the program	52	17.1	25	8.2	135	44.4	92	30.3
If the marriage celebrant encouraged or recommended me to go	48	15.8	60	19.7	138	45.4	58	19.1
If child care were available during the program	160	53.2	29	9.6	68	22.6	44	14.6
If the program did not contain any discussion about religion	70	23.0	60	19.7	93	30.6	81	26.6

Topics that couples (who did not know of programs) would expect to be included in a pre marriage education program

Topics	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
Communication skills	227	8.0
Dealing with conflict	188	6.6
Dealing with differences of opinions	200	7.1
Expectations of marriage	193	6.8
Decision-making and problem solving	205	7.3
Coping with change	175	6.2
Budgeting	189	6.7
Dealing with anger	166	5.9
How to cope with partner's habits	166	5.9
Parenting skills	148	5.2
Roles of husband/wife	141	5.0
Coping with in-laws/family	137	4.8
Sexuality	131	4.6
Family planning	107	3.8
Different family backgrounds	104	3.7
Divorce	85	3.0
Domestic violence	81	2.9
Religion in marriage	46	1.6
Family Law Act	89	3.1
Pre-nuptial contracts	47	1.7
Total responses	2825	100.0

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Pathways to Marriage is a book about couples' and marriage celebrants' views on preparation for marriage and the role of pre-marriage education. It is based on a national survey undertaken in 1993-94 of Australian marriage celebrants and newly married couples. The study involved random samples of over 500 marriage celebrants - both civil and religious - from all states and territories in Australia and 560 couples who had married in 1993.

The book explores the perspectives of both couples and celebrants on how they perceive pre-marriage education and what factors might enhance or inhibit couples taking up learning opportunities to prepare for marriage.

The results of the study reveal that there are many different pathways to marriage, that pre-marriage education means different things to different people and that the factors which inhibit participation in programs are more intrinsic than extrinsic. They indicate that strategies to enhance participation in some form of pre-marriage education will need to address the well-ingrained ideas of pre-marriage education that both couples and celebrants already possess.

Pathways to Marriage is written for human relations and marriage educators and counsellors, civil celebrants, clergy, human service providers, administrators and interested students of marriage and life transition learning. It is the second major research work on pre-marriage education to be completed by the authors. The first was Love, Sex and Waterskiing, published in September 1992.

The research team: Michele Simons, Roger Harris and Peter Willis are based at the Centre for Research in Education and Work (CREW) in the University of South Australia. Michele is a Research Officer in the Centre and also teaches part-time in the School of Human Resource Studies. She has been a senior marriage educator with Catholic Family Services, and a former president of the Catholic Society for Marriage Education. Roger is currently Director of the Research Centre. With a long interest and experience in teaching and research in adult education. He is editor of the Australian Journal of Adult and Community Education, and a marriage educator at Holy Trinity Church, Adelaide. Peter teaches in the School of Human Resource Studies and is involved with research in the Centre. He is convenor of the Adult Educators for Human Development Network of the Australian Association for Adult and Community Education, and his research interest is in adult education for personal and social change.

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